My Experience at GARBO Cooperative: Auto-ethnography about Fair Trade and Rural Tourism in Peñas Blancas, Nicaragua

A Senior Honors Thesis

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by

Alycia M. Buenger

The Ohio State University
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Project Adviser:
Dr. Katherine Borland, Department of Comparative Studies

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Introduction

I came to Ohio State with the ambitious and naïve desire to travel anywhere. The place didn't matter because I had never known any other part of the world. Before 2010, I had never traveled outside the United States. Still, I longed to experience another place, if not for my curiosity about other parts of the world, for my sometimes unfair dislike of a small, rural town in Ohio.

At the end of my freshman year of college, in 2010, I applied for the opportunity to study abroad in Nicaragua for 10 days with the Honors and Scholars Department. I remember expecting a place entirely different from my home in Ohio, but instead finding a place that felt kind of like home. I didn't know how it would happen, but I knew at least that I wanted to come back to Nicaragua someday, and soon. The study abroad trip inspired me to learn Spanish, so I began Spanish language classes at Ohio State at the end of 2010, followed by a language study abroad trip to Ecuador during the summer of 2011. Soon after, I began organizing the preliminary research that would become my Senior Honors Thesis.

The initial study abroad trip to Nicaragua focused on development theory and specifically international development in Central America. The class traveled abroad for the purpose of experiencing Fair Trade production with cooperatives in Nicaragua. We learned that Fair Trade is a movement toward global social justice whose goal is to level the unfair playing field of conventional production and trade by paying workers a living wage and maintaining safe and healthy working conditions for producers. We traveled to several communities in Nicaragua where cooperative members produced coffee, t-shirts, and handcrafted pottery. We visited both free trade and fair trade facilities and noted how they differed from one another.

After the initial trip to Nicaragua, I began to explore Fair Trade in the United States as a consumer by purchasing Fair Trade coffee and tea in place of the conventionally-produced options. I visited Global Gallery in Columbus and learned that I could participate in international social justice by changing my purchasing patterns and buying the Fair Trade options available. Global Gallery is a nonprofit Fair Trade organization with three locations in Columbus, Ohio. The Short North location offers a variety of alpaca winter wear, cotton leggings and socks, spring dresses, home décor items, stationary, jewelry, and other things produced in Bolivia, Nicaragua, India, Ghana, Sri Lanka, and other countries. The Global Gallery Coffee Shop in Clintonville additionally offers a selection of Fair Trade coffees and teas produced around the globe and mixed with local milk and organic or Fair Trade syrups. The organization's website explains that Global Gallery is dedicated to "promoting Fair Trade handcrafted products from around the world while developing cultural enrichment through educational workshops and social events" ("About Us," Global Gallery). They provide internships and volunteer opportunities for learning about international social justice and how individuals can participate locally in a global situation.

I started volunteering with Global Gallery in 2011 after my first trip to Nicaragua. I helped create a Global Gallery store on-campus in 2012 and became Manager of the store during its first year in operation. Now I work as a barista at the Global Gallery Coffee Shop, and so find my interests in Fair Trade coffees and teas.

Therefore, after my initial experience in Nicaragua and only two weeks abroad, I continued my exploration of Fair Trade as both a consumer and as a worker in a consuming country. These experiences largely informed my developing understanding for what Fair Trade means, although I still couldn't formulate a simple definition. I researched Fair Trade products

and organizations on the internet and asked other participants in Fair Trade about their understandings of it. Fair Trade products at Global Gallery and elsewhere are often sold with tags that indicate where each product was produced and with what materials; the tags also often indicate each product's specific producer and his picture, claiming that the purchase of the product will directly contribute to the development of a school or health clinic in the producing person's community. The Fair Trade label[1] (see Image 1) further claims that the product was produced under fair labor conditions, with environmentally-friendly production practices, and for a fair wage. Therefore, my first understanding of Fair Trade (and one that many first-time consumers of Fair Trade discover, too) defined it *as a "fairer" trading relationship which allowed for a direct impact of consuming countries on producing ones by way of community development projects*. I also assumed that "environmentally-friendly" meant organic.

As I continued to study Fair Trade in my classes at Ohio State, I learned that popular definitions of Fair Trade and the ones created for consumers are not necessarily the same as the ones accepted by global Fair Trade organizations that work with producers. It's too difficult for Fair Trade organizations to include the complexities of Fair Trade on a label, so formal and academic definitions of Fair Trade are left for further research (like mine).

Importantly, most of the academic and published research about Fair Trade has mainly focused on the impact consumers have on producing communities (see Alvarado, DeCarlo, and Hira and Ferrie). Therefore, my first intention for a thesis project was to focus instead on producers and their ideas about Fair Trade rather than on consumers' understandings.

[1] The Fair Trade label certifies that the product has been produced under Fair Trade conditions. The tag is used only for marketing purposes.

Preliminary Research: what is Fair Trade?

There are several Fair Trade organizations (available for search online), each with its own definition and standards for what is universally called Fair Trade. Most of the information from various sources is similar, but there have also been disagreements about the accepted standards of Fair Trade, and more specifically about how to define Fair Trade certification. I will focus on information from four Fair Trade organizations because they are the dominant organizations in Fair Trade and the most relevant for this paper. World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), Fair Trade Federation (FTF), Fair Trade International (FLO), and Fair Trade USA are leading organizations that define Fair Trade in somewhat different ways.

Both WFTO and FLO accept one overarching definition for Fair Trade. In the 2009 official document, a "Charter of Fair Trade Principles," Fair Trade is defined as "a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade Organizations, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade." This explains that Fair Trade is a *partnership* between producers in the developing world and buyers in developed nations. Fair Trade's goal is to establish *equitable* international trade that develops the conditions of producers marginalized by conventional trade via *conscious consumption* in developed countries. Conscious consumption means that consumers at least pay attention to where their products are produced and under what conditions. These consumers often demand that the producers receive an adequate wage for their labor.

WFTO provides a more specific explanation by laying out 10 principles of Fair Trade:

- Creating opportunities in trade for economically disadvantaged producers and providing small producers with income security, the ability for self-sufficiency, and opportunities for ownership;
- Maintaining transparency and accountability in management and decision-making for both producing cooperatives and Fair Trade buyers;
- Maintaining "Fair Trade Practices" which include no maximization for profit at the expense of producers, concern for social/economic/environmental well-being of producers, consultation with supplier before order cancellation, long-term relationships between producers and buyers, effective communication between trading partners, and promotion and protection of cultural identity;
- Providing a fair price that is mutually agreed upon to provide fair pay to producers and support the market;
- Eliminating child and forced labor;
- Maintaining standards of non-discrimination and gender equity;
- Providing safe and healthy working conditions;
- Building capacity through direct relationships between producers and other organizations;
- Promoting Fair Trade by raising awareness for the need for social justice;
- Respecting the environment by maximizing the use of raw and local materials while minimizing the impact of waste and using only organic or low-pesticide production methods.

FTF adopts a similar list of 10 principles, adding a stronger focus on the impact of consumers on producers. The website explains that "Fair Trade is about making a tremendous impact on artisan

and farmer communities while offering great products to the public" ("What is Fair Trade," Fair Trade Federation). Consumption in the developed world is expected to directly improve the conditions of workers in the developing world.

Both WFTO and FTF certify Fair Trade organizations from every spectrum of the supply chain, from producers to buyers and retailers. They provide labels that signify the organization is a member. Labeling is different between WFTO and FTF; Fair Trade organizations usually have one or the other, or they apply for both separately. The labels do not certify products; they only certify that member organizations follow the 10 Principles of Fair Trade. FLO and Fair Trade USA certify products, ensuring that the items also follow the 10 Principles of Fair Trade and/or another set of guidelines specific to individual products like coffee or tea.

In 2011 Fair Trade USA split from FLO; each organization now maintains different qualifications for product certification. FLO standards differ depending on whether the Fair Trade organization is buying or selling products. They also differ by the type of producer. For example, trading companies are required to provide a price that is adequate to support sustainable production, a Fair Trade premium, partial payment in advance (upon request of producer), and a signed contract that agrees to a long-term relationship with the producer. Also, small producers are required to be small-scale and democratically organized. FLO offers member certification and also coordinates Fair Trade labeling and certification via FLO-CERT. Both the websites for FLO and FLO-CERT are largely unhelpful in defining the standards of Fair Trade, except to say that FLO-CERT certification follows the aforementioned "Charter of Fair Trade Principles" definition of Fair Trade[2].

[2] A longer list of qualifications explains more specific requirements for producers seeking Fair Trade certification, but my research does not focus on these specific qualifications, so I will not expound them further (Fair Labeling Organization).

In contrast, Fair Trade USA certifies large farming plantations along with small cooperatives. Fair Trade USA defines Fair Trade using six principles. These overlap with and diverge from the WFTO principles in interesting ways:

- Empowerment indicates that the organization supports democratic and transparent decision-making on large or small cooperative farms;
    - Organizations democratically decide how to spend the Fair Trade premium on community development projects and training sessions that teach workplace safety and non-discrimination policy.
- Economic Development means developing stable partnerships between producers and buyers that pre-determine Fair Trade premiums and guarantee minimum prices for certain commodities;
- Social Responsibility prohibits forced and child labor, ensures health and safety measures for production facilities, and guarantees workers' access to healthcare and primary education.
- Environmental Stewardship prohibits the use of GMOs in Fair Trade products and offers an additional premium for organically certified cooperatives;
    - This indicates that no harmful agrochemicals are allowed but organic products require additional certification.
- Direct Trade indicates that relationships between producers and buyers happen "as directly as possible to eliminate unnecessary middlemen" ("Fair Trade Standards: Principles," Fair Trade USA).
- Community Development promises that Fair Trade premiums will be directed toward social and community development projects, like "scholarships, schools, quality

> improvement and leadership training, and organic certification" ("Fair Trade Standards: Principles," Fair Trade USA).

Therefore, Fair Trade USA defines Fair Trade as a market-based approach to social justice that calls for direct trade and support for community development.

With its initiative to expand market-based Fair Trade, Fair Trade USA also invites big, multinational companies like Starbucks to buy Fair Trade certified products. For example, in 2000, Fair Trade USA supported Starbucks minute incorporation of Fair Trade coffee into its buying practices and marketing regime. After numerous protests outside its coffee shops, Starbucks reluctantly agreed to sell a small selection of only whole bean, bagged Fair Trade coffee on its shelves (Fridell, 86). And Fair Trade USA celebrated the involvement of a large corporation in the Fair Trade market. The incorporation of big companies in Fair Trade prompted Fair Trade USA's "Fair Trade for All" initiative in 2011. The initiative aims to certify large farming plantations along with small cooperatives in order to double the impact of Fair Trade by 2015 (Zinn). Fair Trade USA invites more farmers into Fair Trade certification and creates more opportunity for corporate involvement.

Fair Trade USA's "Fair Trade for All" initiative and new certification has not been without controversy among other Fair Trade organizations. Critics of Fair Trade USA's initiative argue that the decision allows the organization to represent Fair Trade but with watered down standards, or perhaps different standards that are no longer Fair Trade (NPR Staff). In order to include more producers in its certification, Fair Trade USA labels products that are only 10 percent fair trade certified, even by these new and less rigorous standards (Neuman). This means that retailers can advertise items as 100 percent fair trade, even though only 10 percent of their ingredients are produced under fair trade conditions. Dean Cycon, founder of the fair trade coffee

cooperative Dean's Beans in the United States, points out that with this initiative, big-name coffee companies like Starbucks will be able to buy all of their coffee certified fair trade and therefore advertise themselves 100% fair trade, "not because they've changed their business practices one iota but because Fair Trade USA has changed the rules of the game" (Neuman). This allows fair trade retailers to sell things that are only fractionally produced via fair trade standards. Further it supports certification of large producers which hurts small producing cooperatives already involved in the movement (Johannessen and H. Wilhite, 526). And this is what Fair Trade was established to avoid in the first place.

Big name companies like Starbucks have been attacked for using Fair Trade as an advertising ploy by misleading consumers that their buying practices are 100 percent Fair Trade. In response to these attacks, Starbucks started its own ethical certification in 2009 as a means to ethically certify all of its coffee. Therefore, the company no longer purchases Fair Trade certified coffee and instead certifies its own coffee through a third party certifier. Starbucks certification is not the same as FLO-CERT or Fair Trade USA certification. However, both Starbucks and Fair Trade USA receive certification from SCS Global Services. This company maintains a number of different ethical certifications, but both "Starbucks Ethical Sourcing: C.A.F.E. Practices" and "Fair Trade USA Certification" are listed on the website together under Certified Sustainable Agriculture.

I have outlined several definitions of Fair Trade and standards that vary by organization and Fair Trade certifier because this information is necessary to understand the foundational parts of my research project and following thesis.

In the research that follows, I will continue to challenge three main ideas about Fair Trade that are first addressed in the previous definitions of it: (1) does equitable trade function as

directly as consumers assume it does; (2) is sustainable development really sustainable if it is not also evidently organic; and (3) are consumers and/or Fair Trade organizations actively involved in community development projects in producing communities?

The Original Research Project

The original research project does not match the final project and results that have become the body of these pages. However, it is important to explain its focus, research goals, and methodologies because these are foundational aspects to the current project. The original project focused on the difference between Starbucks and FLO-CERT coffee certification for one small cooperative in the northern mountains of Nicaragua. Los Guardianes del Bosque (GARBO) coffee cooperative in Peñas Blancas maintains both of these certifications and so appeared to provide the perfect research site.

Mark Lester, Regional Co-Director for the Center for Global Education in Managua and Field Director with Winds of Peace Foundation, who I met during my first trip to Nicaragua, helped me connect with GARBO cooperative members. Mark has experience working with GARBO as well as with other coffee cooperatives in Nicaragua, and explained that GARBO members gladly accept researchers, students, and tourists in their community. GARBO is located on a private nature reserve in Peñas Blancas, Nicaragua, where local farmers own large parts of the land. The cooperative offers rural tourism and accommodations for visitors and even researchers, so they have the means to host people in the cooperative's *eco-albergue* (eco-lodge) or in family homes.

Mark placed me in contact with Maria[3], a university student and volunteer whose family belongs to the cooperative. Maria helped me organize my stay with cooperative members, and she explained the history of GARBO.

The coffee cooperative originated between 2002 and 2003 in response to the 2001 coffee crisis that devastated small coffee farmers throughout Central America. In 2001, the price for coffee dropped so low that some farmers in Mexico and Central America chose not even to harvest their crop because no income was about equal to a little income for a lot of labor (Tuckman). Community members in Peñas Blancas began looking for a better way and a better market to sell their yearly coffee crop. They also started thinking about finding another source of stable and reliable income that might protect them from another commodity crisis.

In 2002, NITLAPAN visited the community to organize a cooperative and a rural tourism project in Peñas Blancas. NITLAPAN is an institute sponsored by the Central American University in Managua that promotes rural and urban development projects in Nicaragua. GARBO coffee cooperative started with about 20 members and expanded to 40 members soon after. Only 10 families arrived to the meeting with NITLAPAN about rural tourism, so they were the only ones invited to participate in this project (interview with Maria). According to Maria, the cooperative only met with NITLAPAN one time before they were expected to organize entirely on their own; therefore, the project has remained small and unorganized. Currently, the whole cooperative has 80 members, although only 40 of them are regular and active participants who attend meetings and work to develop the organization. The rural tourism project had a slow start, beginning for most families after 2009. Only nine families currently participate.

[3] Maria is a pseudonym requested by the speaker who also asked not to be recorded during the interview. My comments about Maria's interview are taken from field notes recorded during our conversation(s).

It is important to mention here El Centro del Entendimiento de la Naturaleza (The Center for Understanding Nature), or CEN, which is another rural tourism site located only minutes from GARBO on the same nature reserve. CEN is a research center and eco-albergue that invites researchers and tourists to Peñas Blancas for "ecologically-responsible" and adventurous activities in the reserve. CEN and GARBO share an interest in rural tourism in the area, but the organizations do not always work together. CEN is not a cooperative and does not support FLO-CERT or Starbucks certification and production in the area. The organization works to protect its portion of the nature reserve by its own initiative. However, the organizations sometime work together to provide lodging and meals to large groups of tourists. CEN's tourism project is currently more successful than GARBO's because of its consistent flow of researchers and greater resources for publicity of its project.

I proposed to spend 10 weeks with GARBO members in Peñas Blancas researching GARBO's coffee certification and members' opinions of it. Maria helped me organize two-week homestays with five families who volunteered to host me and participate in my research[4]. I planned to use methods of *participant observation* and *narrative inquiry* (interviews) to develop a case study of GARBO cooperative and members.

Participant observation would allow me to participate in the daily lives of cooperative members while noting my observations about the life and my experiences of it. I would observe the lives of cooperative members, both coffee producers and participants in rural tourism, by watching and participating in daily activities. Then I would record my observations and experiences in a detailed field journal.

[4] Families were compensated financially for hosting me in their homes. I paid the $7 per night fee that regular tourists pay throughout the duration of my stay.

Narrative inquiry is the researcher's collection of narrative interviews or stories by people directly involved in the subject being researched. I hoped to develop intimate relationships with the members of GARBO by living and talking with them so that I could later interview them and collect their stories. I developed questions about family histories, Starbucks and FLO-CERT certifications, and members' personal experiences with rural tourism (See Appendix 1-4). I planned to record a series of 12-18 interviews with participant members about the history of GARBO and their individual experiences with Fair Trade (and later rural tourism).

Less than three months in a place would hardly give me the authority to speak for its population; so I did not plan to do that. Instead I would speak *auto-ethnographically* as myself, the young and inexperienced researcher and tourist in a foreign place. Auto-ethnography is a research and writing approach that uses description and analysis in order to understand a certain cultural experience (Ellis, et al., 273). An auto-ethnographer uses storytelling, personal reflection, and interviews to analyze and elucidate her experience. Auto-ethnography is more valuable than writing only a personal account of the experience (although this is part of it), because the researcher is combining personal experience with critical analysis. Further, an auto-ethnographer "must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders [of a certain culture]" (Ellis, et al., 276). I planned to write a story about my experience in Peñas Blancas that both my family in Ohio and my new family in Nicaragua could understand and relate to.

The New Project and Thesis

My project changed focus when I reached Peñas Blancas and learned more about the rural tourism project. Because of poor timing and little knowledge about coffee production, I

visited the community several weeks after the end of the coffee harvest season. During my three-month stay, my project changed to focus more on the experience of rural tourism and its relationship to coffee certification because I stayed with five families involved in the project. I learned about these families' experiences with tourism and wondered how or even whether the project related to Fair Trade's principle of "community development," as I assumed it did.

Before I go further to explain my interest in rural tourism, I will briefly describe what I mean by that term (briefly, because my selection of a proper term for tourism is less important and less interesting than my research about it in the following pages). There are several kinds of tourism that might refer to what I am writing about. I define tourism at GARBO as *rural tourism* because it is tourism happening in a rural place. Mark Lester describes it as *turismo en la finca* (tourism on the farm), and rural tourism is my rough translation of that. Some writers of tourism like this explain that it provides a way for rural areas to develop (See McAveavey and McDonagh). Michael Hall, for example, writes about *pro-poor tourism* which intends to bring tourism to poorer countries as a development tool to boost local economies. Another author, I. Munt, identifies *eco-tourism* as a way to preserve precious ecological landscapes and cultural identities through travel[5]. *Sustainable tourism*, *responsible tourism*, and *cultural tourism* are other terms tossed around to describe an alternative tourism that is supposed to be more ecologically conscious and respectful of global cultures than conventional tourism. Even the term "alternative tourism" is questioned when used as an overarching term to describe anything but fancy hotels and expensive resorts (See Smith and Adington).

Because identifying a name for tourism is clearly complicated, I hesitate to call tourism in Peñas Blancas by any one of the terms listed above. I settle on rural tourism because it seems

[5] Both Hall and Munt problematize these kinds of tourism and question the validity and/or accuracy of their identifying terms.

the most logical to me—tourism in a rural place. However, for the purposes of this essay, the term I choose to describe tourism with GARBO is decidedly less important than exploring my experience of tourism in the community.

I quickly learned that GARBO members participating in the rural tourism project had higher expectations for its success than concern about coffee certification. Certified coffee and other produce does not provide stable family income year round, so members seek other ways to make money. They hope that the rural tourism project will become their main and stable source of income during non-harvest season.

Still, I determined that coffee certification would remain a part of my project because members are also coffee farmers, even if tourism is their main and favorite project. To link these aspects in a thesis paper, I decided to look for the connection between coffee certification and rural tourism, if there was one. Did Fair Trade organizations, Fair Trade buyers, or Starbucks certifiers in the United States and Europe endorse the tourism project? How did they support it? Did Fair Trade and Starbucks certified coffee bring tourists to visit the cooperative? What was the connection? Or why did GARBO concentrate on both coffee production and rural tourism?

Addressing these changes to the original project proposal, I have identified new research aims. One aim is to show how Fair Trade practices differ from the principles. I will examine the directness of Fair Trade, whether or not "environmentally-friendly" means organic, and the involvement of FLO-CERT and Starbucks certifiers in GARBO's community development projects. A second aim is to examine the importance of rural tourism for GARBO cooperative members. I will explore the opinions of families and make my own observations about the benefits to and problems with rural tourism in Peñas Blancas.

Outline of paper

I am writing this text for readers who may or may not already know about Nicaragua, about Fair Trade coffee certification, about the experience or how it feels to be a tourist from the "developed" world (USA) in a "developing" country (Nicaragua). I am writing about my experience in Nicaragua with new friends, new families, new experiences, and most intimately, new understandings about people, development, Fair Trade, and tourism. The text is intentionally narrative so that it's accessible for anyone who wants to read and understand my experience[6].

I begin by detailing the travel experience from Masaya (south of Managua) to Peñas Blancas (northwest of Matagalpa). I stayed with a family in Masaya for several weeks before beginning my research in the mountains. That experience is not referred to in the following pages, but it provided me with the language abilities and confidence I needed to embark on a solo research trip.

From the travel experience and reflections about my first day and night at GARBO, I go on to explain my two-week experiences with each of the families in five separate sections. Each one brings new insight to inform my thesis. Finally, I conclude with reflections about Fair Trade and rural tourism as they refer to my experiences with families from GARBO.

Travel to Peñas Blancas

The bus to Matagalpa from Masaya leaves early in the morning. The express bus arrives in two and a half hours. The "chicken bus," or the non-express bus, adds 30 minutes to the trip because it stops to pick up and drop off travelers along the way. It's important to arrive early to Matagalpa anyway because the second bus to Peñas Blancas leaves only at select times

[6] While I was living with GARBO members and researching life in Peñas Blancas, I read Roger Lancaster's book, *Life is Hard.* Throughout this essay, I use a model similar to his, of studying culture by documenting everyday life.

throughout the morning, the last one at 1:30 P.M. A 15 còrdoba ($0.65) taxi ride goes from the first bus station to Terminal Guanuca where six disorderly bus lines await trips to northern parts of the country.

Terminal Guanuca is an exhausting experience. Matagalpans and other local travelers sit on the few available benches or stand uncomfortably in the sunshine. A grumpy and largely unhelpful man stands between buses four and five barking arrival and departure information to pushy travelers busy with their luggage. Unlucky travelers spend the three-hour trip from Matagalpa to Peñas Blancas standing in the aisle attached to nothing but an overhead stabilizing pole, squished between bodies of farmers in work boots and women in wedge heels. Children crowd the aisles or dangle dangerously between their parents.

I was amazed from my first day abroad until the last as I watched human beings do what I thought impossible. In the morning markets of Masaya, regular-sized men and boys carry six-foot wide baskets full of watermelon, melons, and mangoes, up ladders and onto the bus. Women balance heavy baskets of food-for-sale atop their heads as they walk along sidewalks plagued with pot holes. And on most trips by bus, travelers stand for hours as the bus jerks sporadically along winding hills and rocky roads.

On my first trip to Peñas Blancas, no one seemed phased when the bus broke down halfway to Peñas Blancas and the skinny bus boy leapt out the door to retrieve buckets of creek water to cool the engine. Nor did anyone seem surprised when the bus ran into a cow in the middle of the road, stopping only long enough to honk the horn. I pretended not to notice these things, too, because I wanted to blend in as though I were Nicaraguan.

I didn’t expect it, but people in Nicaragua largely let me fit in as one of their own. I looked different (although in the north, many people matched my pale skin tone and light eyes),

and my Spanish was surely more slowly pronounced; but no one seemed to notice or care that I was different. Even before settling in with the families in the mountains, I felt welcomed and embraced by a country I hardly knew and its people. To them I was just another face walking the streets, no different from anyone else.

For example, several weeks before my trip to Peñas Blancas, I traveled to Masaya to stay with a family and practice my new Spanish language skills. I had spent just one day in Masaya several years before and fell in love with the place and the people. I had been there with the group of students and professors from Ohio State learning about Fair Trade with a hammock cooperative in the city. We also learned a Nicaraguan folk dance with a local ballet teacher, drank naturally pink juice that tasted like cough medicine, and visited a community school. I remembered that Masaya felt like home, so I traveled there again before my research excursion to the mountains to visit.

For two weeks, I stayed with a family in the outskirts of town. I was there to practice my beginner Spanish with people who almost never slowed their speaking and always expected me to understand anyway. I practiced speaking mostly with the neighbor children. It hardly mattered that I didn't understand them. The children were happy to have someone listen to them and value their nonsensical jabber. Tia Carmen (Aunt Carmen) and her husband Bayron let me stay in their small home and sleep in a bed next to the kitchen. Tia Carmen cooked my meals and invited me to try her favorite foods at street stands. It was more difficult to leave the family than I expected, but I said good-bye and headed to the mountains with a little more confidence than before.

At mile marker 195 on the lone road that leads north, there's a tiny sign with hardly visible writing that reads, "Eco-albergue: Los Guardianes del Bosque, Peñas Blancas" (Eco-lodge: Guardians of the Forest, Peñas Blancas). As I lumbered from the bus with a large suitcase

and a stuffed backpack, I glanced awestruck toward the beautiful green landscape and then white rocks that appeared to extend all the way to the furthest fluffy cloud. The day was sunny and clear, almost warm with fresh bursts of wind (I would soon learn that this kind of weather is unusual in Peñas Blancas—cold rain and a moving cloud cover are normal). During my first day in the mountains, my life felt euphoric and almost unbelievable. I was in what had to be one of the most beautiful places on earth.

Don Jesus met me at the bus stop. In a few days I would stay with his family, but for now we just suffered an awkward introduction with his shy and mumbled greeting and my rough Spanish. We walked to the eco-albergue where I would stay the first night (a member of Don Jesus' family had died earlier in the week, so the family was still consumed in religious ritual and mourning when I arrived).

The accommodations were more comfortable than I expected. The cooperative eco-albergue is one large cabin that was built 10 years earlier with volunteer labor from the cooperative. It contains six medium-sized rooms with three bunk beds each. Every room also has one electric light hanging at its middle, a plastic chair, and a bin for garbage. Inside every room, the beds are tucked in with two large blankets and a pillow. Maybe the cooperative is expecting a group of tourists soon, I thought (although in three months in Peñas, I saw only one or two groups of tourists; usually tourists came in pairs or alone, having stumbled so far north without even knowing about the cooperative before finding it). Another, smaller cabin on stilts stands comfortably in the distance. That one has two private, matrimonial suites for vacationing couples who prefer privacy Jesus told me, embarrassed to be saying all of those words. Between the cabins stand two bathrooms, one marked for men and the other for women. Inside, the door locks behind the seated part of a porcelain toilet and a bucket for water next to a spout. It took me a

minute to find the light switch and another minute to discover the flushing method of this mostly modern toilet (dump half a bucket of water into the pot and it flushes without the knob).

I was surprised that the cooperative offered such comfortable accommodations—electricity and relatively modern toilets. Even the shower room spouted water from a hanging faucet that drained to somewhere beneath the floor. In Masaya, a small city with easy access to other cities, a bustling fruit and vegetable market, and cell phone and internet service, I had used an outdoor *letrina* (outhouse) and bathed with a bucket. Peñas Blancas was far more isolated than Masaya, but the cooperative offered accommodations comfortable for a Western tourist.

As the sun was setting in front of us, beneath a sloping field of potatoes and red beans, I walked with Arturo (head of another host family) and Henry (paid maintenance man at the eco-albergue) down the mountainside and into a green pasture. There was a gigantic tree with its branches gracefully dancing against a pink and purple sky. I felt like I was the princess in a fairytale. Henry pointed to a smaller tree that he said changes colors and loses its leaves with the four seasons (seasons that do not really exist in the area). The most amazing part is that this is the only tree that responds to its internal seasonal pattern; the other trees in Peñas Blancas remain the same throughout the year or respond only to Nicaragua's two-season dry-wet pattern.

By the time we arrived in Doña Julia's *comedor* (eatery), it was already dark outside at 6:30 P.M. Don Chico and Doña Julia would be my host parents in several weeks, but for now I was getting to know them because they owned the only restaurant anywhere close to the cooperative (the next closest one is located several kilometers south along the carretera). We sat down to dinner in Doña Julia's kitchen and were immediately served steaming hot coffee in variously sized tea cups and coffee mugs with English lettering. I thought about asking for sugar but realized with my first sip that it wouldn't be necessary. The coffee was sweet with more

water and sugar than bean. I learned later that most of the coffee consumed by the grower families is the leftover crop from last year's harvest. The imperfect beans or the ones harvested after sale are saved for the coffee farmers' and their families' consumption, because nothing goes to waste in Nicaragua.

The coffee plant is not native to Nicaragua. Actually, it is thought to have originated in Ethiopia where it still exists today. In the 1700s, Dutch colonization brought the coffee crop to South America and the Caribbean for production in the colonies ("The Story of Coffee"). As with other crops introduced to the area, Europeans seized the opportunity to increase production in the Americas for export to Europe (Rudel, 34). Fertile soils in Latin America and easy coastal access for transportation provided the perfect location for the production of a borrowed African crop, and cheap labor in the Americas allowed European colonizers to maximize both production and profit for their own benefit.

Coffee was introduced to the Southern Uplands of Nicaragua during the 1820s in addition to the region's already developed agricultural sector; later in the 1840s, the Nicaraguan government promoted coffee production by offering benefits to farmers who cultivated the new crop so as to provide a better avenue in the market of international coffee trade, which was already booming at the beginning of the 19th century (Revels, 18-9). Not until the 1870s did coffee make its way to the North-Central Highlands of Nicaragua (Peñas Blancas) because improved transportation routes allowed for exportation of crops from the area (Revels, 20). Therefore coffee production is not indigenous to Nicaragua or its people.

Still, coffee is the main crop produced for export in Peñas Blancas. The cool climate during most of the year and the six-month rainy season allow several varieties of coffee to flourish in the mountains. Area families grow coffee beans all year long and then harvest them at

the end of every year, between December and February. I missed most of the coffee harvest during my visit, but I learned about it and several other aspects of growing coffee by interviewing grower families. Even families involved in the tourism project maintain several *manzanas* (a measuring unit equivalent to 1.75 acres) of coffee. And they enjoy explaining coffee production and demonstrating the process for tourists.

First Family: Don Jesus and Nohemi

Don Jesus is a short man. Even I see over his head, and I can hardly reach a door frame at 5'4. His height does not diminish his strength, though, because carrying a bushel of plantains up and down the hillside is more than a little exhausting (I can only assume, because I can hardly lift the bushel a few inches from the ground, let alone above my head and to a comfortable place on my shoulder). On my first day with the family, Jesus met me at the cooperative to lead me to his home. Jesus and his family live about 20 or 30 minutes away from the carretera[7], in a place neatly situated between open mountain fields and beautiful green forest. Jesus carried my 50 pound luggage on his shoulders and still walked faster and breathed more easily than me.

I enjoyed walking through the forest. Eventually I would learn this path so well that I could take it alone and with my eyes closed. But for now I followed Jesus up and down the rocky carretera, across two rivers and a smaller creek, and on skinny paths between coffee plants and banana trees.

[7] Notice that I leave select words in Spanish untranslated to English. This is because some Spanish words do not have a neat and perfect translation into English. For example, carretera means main road in English. But a main road in Nicaragua appears much differently than a main road in the United States. Importantly, I do not want the reader to think about a main road as s/he knows it in the United States or elsewhere. I want my reader to think about a specific kind of main road called the carretera in Nicaragua. It is not a main road like in Ohio, but instead a rocky one-lane road that winds up the mountainside and provides transportation for a few buses and other cars every day. I have chosen not to translate other words for similar reasons.

Jesus guided me to his small home next to a sloping field with coffee and banana trees. He had built the house nearly 20 years before when he and his partner, Nohemi, became pregnant with their first child. Jesus and Nohemi never married, but they left their families' homes as teenagers, at ages 19 and 15 respectively, and remained together through a challenging relationship. Nohemi says that leaving home was so hard for her that she often cried during the day, even though her mother lived close by.

The view of the white rocks from Jesus' home is picturesque. And actually, the view from the outhouse exit is the most beautiful I found in all of Peñas Blancas. The outhouse faces the rocks, and as the door is pushed open, your eye moves from fields of beans and potatoes to green mountain landscape spotted with wooden houses. Giant, white rocks appear to touch the clouds. And if you stare long enough, as I did on many occasions, you can see the largest waterfall in Peñas Blancas. It appears like a trickle from far away.

On my first day with the family, Nohemi greeted me shyly at the doorway and insisted that I accept a cup of coffee and bread with honey. Twenty-year-old Ander was still working as a tour guide with CEN. Sometimes he stays the night there instead of walking home after dark. Teenage boys Wilmon and Jelsen shook my hand and stared at their feet. Five-year-old Henr spoke incoherently behind his mother, and three-year-old Josué flashed a flirtatious smile and reached out to touch my pale skin. Whiteness is not uncommon in northern Nicaragua, but I was still foreign to Josué—and it's not often that foreign people come to stay with the families in Peñas Blancas. In fact I was only the second experience many families of GARBO had had with tourists from other countries. I was so interesting to Josué that he eventually proposed marriage to me every morning when I woke up. Or more accurately, he told me that we would get married

the next day, every day. “I’m going to marry you,” he would say, “I’m going to marry you tomorrow.”

Nohemi offered me a seat in the kitchen and poured a cup of coffee. “Henr is shy, but he will warm up to you,” Nohemi said, “And Josué is poorly behaved because his mother, my daughter, left when he was young. She doesn’t visit very often anymore.” Nohemi offered information that I hardly had time to ask for, and she always said the most serious and heart-breaking things matter-of-factly. Now that her only daughter lives in Managua with a new boyfriend, Nohemi is the lone woman in the household. She cooks three meals a day for a family of six boys; she feeds the chickens and the piglet with leftover scraps; she cares for and disciplines the two youngest boys; she cleans the dirt floors and wipes the countertops; she scrubs dirty jean pants and faded white socks and underwear until her hands are pruned and nearly frozen from the ice-cold river water. For this reason, I think, Nohemi expressed great excitement to have a temporary female companion in the household. Maybe this is also why she shared so openly with me about her life—I was a woman and therefore someone she felt comfortable speaking to.

I enjoyed speaking with and learning from Nohemi because she treated me as part of her family. I felt more like her daughter than a foreigner. She warmed my bath water so I wouldn’t get sick; she reminded me to make my bed; she showed me how to sweep the dirt floor, and then let me have that chore for the remainder of my visit; she taught me how to fry rice and how not to burn my hand on a wood-burning stove; and she often asked me to do the dishes after lunch. With future families I would be treated more like a guest than a daugher, served first at dinnertime and mostly barred from household chores. But Nohemi loved me like her own and spoke to me as a friend.

I was shown to my room in the family's home. Their guest room is the largest room in the house and empty except for a twin-size bed, a small table, and several bags of fertilizer seed in the corner. A small window and moveable shutter let light in during the day and keep bugs out at night. The bed was handmade by Jesus. It's comfortable, even with a thin mattress and thinner sheets. I learned to sleep in several pairs of pants and a sweatshirt in Peñas Blancas because nights are always cold. Jesus informed me that he plans to build a bunk bed for the room when tourism starts providing the family with sufficient income.

A curtain separates the bedroom from the entrance area. Another wooden door leads to a smaller bedroom that the rest of the family members share. The only other room in the house is the kitchen, which is probably the one most utilized. Often, Nohemi fries rice or plantain chips while the rest of the family sips coffee and listens to revolutionary music or news on the radio. There is no television, because there is no electricity.

Sometimes Nohemi makes bread in the kitchen with her mother and sister. Jesus and Nohemi's children share or fight over the pieces she doesn't take to sell at the *venta* (store), often dipping them in coffee or gobbling them in two bites. Nohemi taught me the craft once, and allowed me to participate. Usually her mother measures the flour with a device made from a small plastic bowl tied by a string to a wooden spoon. Somehow she can tell that when the spoon is at a certain level, the bowl contains so many cups of flour. Nohemi measures the sugar by taste and uses eggs from the chickens outside. She mixes the dough by hand and without a bowl. A border of flour surrounds the liquid ingredients that she slowly molds into sticky dough for making various kinds of bread. My favorite is called polvoròn (see Image 2), a flour-based sweet roll with a hint of lemon. Nohemi always reserved several pieces of that bread for me to eat in the afternoon and for breakfast the following day.

One morning Nohemi taught me the everyday task of making corn tortillas in the kitchen. First she let me grind cooked corn with a metal hand grinder attached to the counter (see Image 3). She put a few handfuls of corn into the top funnel part. As I turned the handle, ground corn spilled from the bottom of the funnel into a large bowl. My arm tired quickly as I turned the handle around and around, so I tried with two hands. Nohemi said that it would take time to get used to how hard the handle turned, and I could take a break if I wanted. After at least part of the corn was ground and then re-ground with several other ingredients, the next step was to mold the dough into fat, round circles. Then, my favorite part of the process, which was also the hardest part, was to pat the round dough into flat tortilla shapes (see Image 4).

I remember trying to shape a tortilla three years before at Huembes Market in Managua. I was with a group of students on a 10-day study tour. One of my professors asked a group of working women if they might let me try their trade, and they graciously handed me some dough. Of course I didn't speak Spanish then, so I didn't understand whatever instructions they gave me. When my professor asked one of the women how I was doing, she replied, "Not good, terrible."

Nohemi let me watch her a few times, and when I felt ready to try, she corrected the way I held my hands. Then she let me practice every day, and eventually, she also let me toast the tortillas on the wood-burning stovetop. By the end of the week, Nohemi and I had developed a morning routine where she molded the dough, I patted it into tortilla shapes, and then she toasted the tortillas on the stovetop. I was finally preparing tortillas well enough to serve even to guests.

Often the boys watched me pat tortillas in the morning. Nohemi explained that her sons often helped in the kitchen (for example, Jelsen washes dishes every night after dinner), but they had never helped her make tortillas. Jesus had never helped out in the kitchen, Nohemi said, even when was sick and unable to work. He might be able to fry an egg, she thought, but otherwise he

is entirely dependent and resistant to helping. In fact, Jesus says that work in the kitchen is women's work: "What I do in the field a woman cannot do. She is too weak and delicate, not smart enough. That's why she stays in the house, to serve my meals and clean." I told Nohemi that my dad often helps my mom in the kitchen by washing dishes after dinner or preparing breakfast on the weekends. Nohemi wasn't as shocked to hear this as I expected, but she joked that Jesus should help out too.

One morning, as Jesus watched me pat tortillas and critiqued my hand placement, I suggested that he try it—we would have a competition! Jesus was reluctant at first and complained that his hands were too big, but his sons encouraged him saying, "Alycia will get her camera!" Jesus is left-handed and so struggled more than I did with a right-handed teacher, but he made one tortilla, then another. His tortillas were thicker and less fluffy than maybe they should have been, but Nohemi and I were impressed that he tried. I won the competition (probably because Nohemi was the judge), and later I convinced the boys to pat tortillas, too. Normally, Nohemi is the only cook in the kitchen, but this day she sat and watched while Jesus, Wilmon, Jelsen, and I prepared breakfast (see Images 5 and 6).

When there isn't bread or tortillas being made in the kitchen, there is usually family time in the afternoon. Sometimes I helped Wilmon with his English homework during that time. This was always difficult because Wilmon has class only once per week on Saturdays, and his teacher is a U.S. American student, apparently untrained in teaching and only temporary. Wilmon did not understand the homework, and neither did I sometimes. The lessons were complicated, about matching verb tenses with subjects, though Wilmon hardly understands "Hello, how are you?" in my native language. I tried to help him, but I think I only confused myself—and then became concerned about the quality of his other classes at the Saturday school. I never learned much

about them from Wilmon because he doesn't like school or apply himself to it. And anyway, education isn't really a priority in the household. Five-year-old Henr still does not attend kindergarten, and Nohemi told me that he probably won't next year either, because he is often sick in the mornings.

Because he is younger, Jelsen still attends the primary school along the carretera. I visited Jelsen's school one day while the little boys were receiving vaccinations at a temporary free clinic set up in the community. The school is a small building with four classrooms and four teachers for grades kindergarten through sixth (see Image 7). One teacher teaches the kindergarten class, and the other three teachers and classrooms are divided between the other six grades, two grades per teacher. Profe Flor (Maria's mother) teaches first and second grade at the school. During recess, I spoke with her about the challenges she and the other teachers face teaching 150 students collectively. It's difficult for two grade levels to learn in the same classroom, she explained, because each should be learning different material. For example, the first graders should be learning how to read basic sentences while the second graders should be learning more advanced reading and grammar. Instead, the second graders are re-learning how to read while the first graders are learning that for the first time. Profe Flor also explained that many of the students don't receive support or encouragement to study at home, which doubles the work for school teachers. Additionally, secondary school is an hour bus-ride away and only on Saturdays, so it's easy for students to stop going to school after sixth grade. I met several community members who had either dropped out of school before graduation or returned to school in their mid-twenties or even thirties, because they had to take a long break to work or to raise children.

Neither Jesus nor Nohemi had finished school, partly because they were raising a child by the time high school was an option. Nohemi never mentioned attending any kind of school. During one of my first mornings with the family, I asked Nohemi to spell a word I didn't understand. I was still carrying a Spanish-English dictionary and so thought that if only I could spell the word, I could search for its definition. "I can't write, Alycia," Nohemi said, "Or read. Maybe one of my sons can help you." Neither Nohemi nor Jesus can read or write. I often felt discomfort in thinking about the contradiction of writing about their illiteracy in an Honors thesis that they will never be able to read or understand, in any language.

On one occasion, Jesus and I traveled to La Dalia to purchase several items from the market. Before we left, Nohemi asked me to write down a list of items that she needed for the week, including flour and sugar for baking and rice and beans for making gallo pinto. In the market, Jesus relied on me to relay the list, although he often took it from my hands as though to examine my work. I still wonder how they normally remember the grocery list; I suppose they usually rely on memory.

Often Jesus watched me write while we sat at my favorite spot to reflect, next to the chicken pen. He would watch as the ink formed letters on the page and ask why I held my pen a certain way. Jesus liked to ask a lot of questions about my life in United States. What are the marriage customs in your country? At what age do men and women normally get married? Why are you still unmarried? Does everyone speak English? Do people say bad words? Are there bad words in English? What is the sunset like?

As the sun sank beneath the distant mountainside and we wandered inside to a house warmed by the wood-burning stove-top, Nohemi asked questions, too. Do parents discipline children in the United States? Do children learn to speak English in the States at the same age

children learn to speak Spanish in Nicaragua? Can you show us where Nicaragua is located on this map (a blow-up children's toy globe)?

During my first night with Jesus and Nohemi, I realized that no electricity meant having nothing to do after 7 P.M. Nohemi used a flashlight as she warmed rice and beans over the stovetop, or sometimes a candle provided enough light to fry plantains and make salad. After dinner, Jelsen washed dishes while the rest of us sipped coffee.

One night, a sneaky cockroach jumped from the countertop to very close by my open-toed flip flop. I squealed and pulled my feet underneath me on the wooden bench. The family seemed startled at first, and then they laughed. "You're scared of bugs?" Jesus asked, "Well, nothing scares me." Nohemi looked at me seriously and said, "I'm not afraid of bugs, Alycia, but I am afraid of dead people. And their wakes are always in the dark, which makes them even more terrifying." I agreed, except to say that if a person is dead, what can they do? Why be afraid? "Alycia, bugs can't do much either, and you're still sitting with your feet off the ground."

Then Jelsen chimed in with his own bizarre phobia: "I'm afraid of those people who turn into hairy monkeys and eat people and their children." I laughed, but he was serious. As I wandered to bed that night, I thought about the strange the folktales that might have led to Jelsen's fear of hairy people[8]. And our irrational fears became a daily topic for teasing and easy laughs.

Dinner was usually served early in Nohemi's kitchen, so breakfast was also served early. Regardless, I didn't often wake before 7 A.M. The first few breakfasts in my new home were two-fold: first, I was served coffee and bread, sometimes with honey, and several hours later I was invited to a fuller meal of *gallo pinto* (rice and beans) with cream and tortilla. At first I

[8] This one is about an evil shape shifter called "La Mona." Apparently it's quite common in Latin American legendry.

accepted the large amounts of carbohydrates dipped in cooking oil because I felt uncomfortable asking for anything else or refusing something prepared for me. But after a few days, my body started to bloat and my digestion slowed. I could not handle a diet of only rice and beans, tortillas, potatoes, and plantains, and I wondered how my family could. There didn't seem to be fresh fruits or (non-starchy) vegetables growing in the mountains (because March is the off-season, apparently), so on my next trip to La Dalia with Jesus, I purchased cucumbers and tomatoes, mangoes and pineapple, to share with the family. I decided that my discomfort in changing the family's diet could be translated more usefully as cultural exchange, presumably another part of tourism that so far I had avoided. Maybe it would be beneficial to introduce my own life and my own culture while I was learning about this one, because the family seemed just as interested to learn about me as I was to learn about them. Plus, as Nohemi pointed out, speaking with tourists might be her only experience with people and cultures from outside Peñas Blancas.

I explained to Nohemi that I was used to a different diet, and that maybe I could help her prepare fruits and vegetables for the family during my two-week stay. She agreed, but explained that because these items are usually more expensive than other ones, she hardly purchases them. Again I felt uncomfortable in my affluence because I hadn't even noticed the price of vegetables and fruit in La Dalia (and I might even have unknowingly paid the inflated gringo price).

Nohemi and I talked about the importance of fruits and vegetables in a balanced diet, and I realized that we have different abilities for creating one. It's not often that I think about my budget when buying groceries. In the wintertime in the United States, fruits and vegetables are more expensive, but I always have enough wiggle room in my bank account to purchase at least a few. And if my budget does ask me to sacrifice financially, it's not vegetables that I'm giving

up. I have the privilege of purchasing a balanced meal (or what I think of as a balanced meal, because maybe there's more than one way to be healthy). Instead, Nohemi organizes her family's diet around what's available financially, because her budget is so tight that she might be forced to sacrifice healthy foods, or any purchased foods at all. Fruits and vegetables are expensive. Rice is not, and the family grows beans, potatoes, plantains, and bananas. These items make up the family's diet whether it's balanced or not. Nohemi explained that although her family is poor, they do not eat from what she calls a poor man's plate: "At least we have more than rice and boiled bananas," she said, "That's what really poor people eat."

Nohemi didn't know about the nutritional effects of using large amounts of cooking oil and salt until we talked about it one day. During one of my first few days with the family, I woke up sick in the night with awful stomach pains and the gross need to vomit. I walked outside to the letrina, even though my family warned me never to leave the house alone without at least notifying them first. Of course the creaking door woke all of them, and one by one they followed me outside to care for me during my illness. "Really, I'm fine," I pleaded, because all I really wanted was to be left alone, as that's the accepted approach to illness in my home. They wanted to stay, though, so Nohemi went to the kitchen to make a lemon tea and Jesus patted my head rather awkwardly. In the morning when I was feeling better, after drinking two lemon teas and a cinnamon one, Jelsen and I talked about my body's probable need for an adjustment period to the food. "There's more cooking oil used here than in the foods I am used to, so I'm probably experiencing fat and carbohydrate overload," I said. Jelsen agreed, "And cooking oil and salt are bad for your body anyway." Nohemi looked at Jelsen and then at me; "Is that true, Alycia?"

During a rare afternoon when Jesus was able to watch the house and the children, Nohemi and I attended a women's training at Profe Flor's house. Nohemi is part of a community

women's project that meets with a ministry of the government once per month to learn ways to boost family incomes (I think)[9]. The project is not part of the cooperative, but several women from the cooperative attend the meetings.

This meeting was about producing organic chickens for consumption and sale. It was run by a man who seemed either new to his job or uncomfortable in front of the women. He came from the municipality of Jinotega with handwritten charts and notes for the women to copy and use later. Nohemi asked me to copy notes into her journal, although I'm not sure how she planned to review them later. The man started by talking about the nutritional needs of a chicken. A healthy chicken, and one that produces more eggs and receives the most money for its meat at market, requires proteins, fats and carbohydrates for energy, minerals, vitamins, and water. The women were excited to learn this and asked useful questions about which foods these nutrients might come from. The man explained a recipe for organic chicken feed (concentrate) and stated every ingredient and its nutritional contribution. Then everyone helped to make a batch in Profe Flor's kitchen. (Later, I helped Nohemi make her own batch, but her chickens never developed a palette for the organic feed.)

Then the man from Jinotega drew a picture of a chicken's insides and explained the digestion of nutrients and again their importance in raising healthy chickens. The information seemed new to at least some of the women (Nohemi admitted this to me). I found it sadly ironic that some of the women were learning about the nutritional needs of a chicken before knowing about the nutritional needs for themselves.

During some of my few days spent entirely with Don Jesus, he invited me into the fields to see and participate in planting potatoes. Farming work in Peñas Blancas is not busy all the time because it revolves around the planting and harvesting season for various crops. In March,

[9] This definition is just what I gathered from a conversation with Nohemi and by attending one meeting.

Jesus was busy planting potatoes for the first time in a field that used to be overgrown forest. The first day I watched two long-horned steers lead a wooden tilling device with metal blades at the back. Men stood on either side of the animals to guide them in straight lines. They walked up and down the mountain, horizontally and vertically. The second day I learned how to hoe troughs in the dirt for planting. I remember learning how to hoe dirt in my family's garden once when I was a kid—and I can only imagine how much worse I performed the task at age 10. After half of one row, my arms were tired and I actually felt like taking a nap. Hoeing dirt is a grueling task, and hoeing dirt on a mountainside is worse. As the only woman performing the task, my co-workers observed me very closely. I felt uncomfortable taking breaks too often, even though my weak arms were burning with muscle exhaustion, because I knew that Jesus would make jokes about it later. "Men are just stronger than women," he would say, "And that's why men work in the fields and women perform household tasks."

On the third day Jesus instructed me that we would be spreading fertilizer in the field. I was surprised because I thought that Fair Trade prohibited this practice, but Jesus said that the fertilizer was the weakest kind. It was only necessary to prevent plant illnesses. Still, he handed me a pair of gloves. "The *abono* (fertilizer) is too toxic to touch with your delicate hands," he said. Whether he was saying this because I am a woman or because the fertilizer is too toxic to touch anyone's delicate hands, I don't know. That became my new task placed potatoes sporadically along my trail of seed.

I felt uncomfortable throwing fertilizer because its toxicity concerned me. Henr got very close to the fertilizer when he planted potatoes, and maybe it touched his bare hands. I couldn't understand the "caution" warning on the fertilizer seed bags; and Jesus couldn't read or understand it either. How did we know that the fertilizer was the least dangerous kind? And how

could we be sure that the least dangerous kind wasn't also dangerous? Mostly I was concerned that a fertilizer too toxic for my hands was being applied to things we would eat. In two months at harvest time, Jesus would be digging up these same potatoes, probably without protective gloves, and feeding them to his family[10].

On another day, Jesus invited me to visit the largest waterfall in Peñas Blancas, the one visible from the door of the letrina. The entrance of the waterfall is located on the carretera between the cooperative and CEN. CEN owns the waterfall and charges tourists $10 to see it. They can choose to hike there with or without a guide, but most tourists enjoy the commentary a guide provides. Originally the cooperative paid $2,000 to CEN to share the waterfall and go there with its own tourists and guides, but recently CEN returned the money and revoked permission because they are unhappy with the cooperative's production practices that they say are environmentally unfriendly (interview with Maria).

Jesus and I stopped by CEN before our trip to the waterfall to let them know that we would be hiking the trail. Jesus' son Ander works for CEN as a guide, so his family has a friendly relationship with workers in the center. I didn't have to pay the $10 tourist charge because I was now considered part of that friendly relationship. Still, I noticed discomfort in even this interaction, especially when we talked about coffee. One of the guides politely offered coffee as we sat down to say hello. I was hesitant to accept coffee anywhere in Nicaragua because I hadn't enjoyed a cup so far, but to be polite, I accepted. The coffee was wonderful—I even added a spoonful of sugar because it came to me unsweetened. I asked the guide where this coffee came from, because it didn't taste like the kind I had been drinking in the family's home.

[10] Actually, Jesus' entire potato crop died before harvest time. Jesus explained that he failed to fertilize a second time because his family didn't have money to buy fertilizer, and without the second fertilizer, the potatoes didn't have a strong chance of surviving. They contracted a plant disease that killed the whole crop. Jesus lost all of the capital he invested in the field.

He said it came from a cooperative in Matagalpa, so I asked, "Why not use coffee produced by the local cooperative?" Without reserve the guide replied, "We buy from an organic cooperative because we do not agree with GARBO's production practices." I looked at Jesus, but he was looking at the ground.

We left CEN and headed for the waterfall, but I felt uncomfortable about the exchange I had witnessed and participated in. CEN didn't seem to offer any help in teaching cooperative members about organic production or how to implement it. In fact, CEN bought its coffee elsewhere and ignored the cooperative's attempts to find organic solutions to combat *la roya* ("the rust," a plant illness that has devastated part of Nicaragua's coffee crop for the upcoming 2014 harvest). Later, I learned from Don Chico that CEN has tried to purchase land from local farmers to encourage them to leave the area, maybe because CEN's goal is not to promote organic production in the forest reserve but to save (or steal) it from the farmers. Already CEN owns 100 manzanas of land in owner Don Alan's name (all of the cooperative members I interviewed own substantially less ground, between 8 and 60 manzanas), and apparently CEN plans to own more (interview with Don Chico)[11].

Jesus and I started toward the waterfall, and almost as soon as we did, we saw a family of toucans. There were eight or ten of them, all black-bodied with colorful beaks—the kind of toucans we see in pictures on TV or at zoos in the United States. Because he had experience with tourists, Jesus nudged my elbow and urged me to take pictures of the birds with my camera. Later, he stopped in certain places along the trail so that I could take pictures in all of the picturesque areas where tourists normally like to stop. I was annoyed by this because I didn't want to be a tourist. In some ways, I was trying to deny my identity as a foreigner and a tourist; but also I didn't want to enjoy the moment only with my camera. Of course, a photo of the

[11] For an in-depth reflection about the complications of land-holdings in northern Nicaragua, see Horton.

magical toucans would have helped me remember them later, but I wanted to participate in that moment while it lasted more than scramble to make a memory for later. I hated how easily Jesus identified me as a tourist and changed his behavior to make me a happy one.

As we walked closer to the top of the white rocks where the waterfall gushed, Jesus pointed to several piping systems and explained that they provide running water to at least part of the community. Other parts of the community tap different waterfalls for their water, but this waterfall is the biggest. Jesus joked that I was the owner of the whole water system because an (unnamed) organization in the United States had funded the project that created the pipes. He laughed, but I considered the seriousness of his comment.

Throughout my stay in Peñas Blancas, I noted (mostly in conversations with the farmers) that outside assistance to the community seems frequent but also short-term. A group of Canadians built a privately-run school in the community, but no longer return to provide the school with supplies or adequate teacher salaries. A U.S.-American woman owned the power lines that provide electricity in parts of the community, but community members are unsure whether or not she still lives in the area. And an organization from the United States built a water system in the mountains, but no one seems to know how the idea for the project originated, whether it was suggested to or by local members of the community.

The problems that I heard about seemed to stem from the way that help is handed out to the community. Outside sources often come to the community from the U.S. and Europe with the goal of completing a certain project—whether or not the community members have a say in what that project is. These sources fund and direct the project, with or without help from community members; and then the outside initiators leave. Community members don't feel that the project is

their own because they have little or no part in the whole process. And now Jesus jokes that I own the water in his home.

Although the community appears dependent on these outside development projects, I remain skeptical. At least some of the projects are imposed on the community, and regardless of whether or not community members enjoy the benefits of these projects, they are not really given a choice to implement or reject them. I am hesitant to say that the community requires outside help, only because I know that it will survive regardless. If there is one thing I learned in Nicaragua and Peñas Blancas, it is that Nicaraguans are resilient. They will survive, because they're capable of that. However, more importantly, they deserve the right to ask for help, or at least the right to accept or refuse it.

Summary of "First Family"

In this first experience with Fair Trade and rural tourism in Peñas Blancas, I was introduced to several new ideas. First, I learned that the reality of Fair Trade is different from the principles and accepted definition. Fair Trade in Peñas Blancas might not be completely organic, and development projects in the community are not linked to Fair Trade certifiers or buyers. Although families in Peñas Blancas face limited access to education, Fair Trade certifiers and buyers do not have the direct relationships with community members that might permit them to assist the community in combatting problems.

GARBO does not receive local support for its tourist project or certification either. GARBO does not have a supportive relationship with neighboring CEN, because CEN does not support GARBO's production practices. Though GARBO farmers would benefit by selling some of their coffee locally to CEN and its tourists, the research center does not purchase coffee from the cooperative because it is not organic.

At this first household, I also noticed that gender roles strongly influence the organization of the family and household system. Jesus has an opinion about his role in the household to perform only work that men should do—fieldwork, heavy lifting, traveling to the market in La Dalia, and providing for the whole family. However, Nohemi explained that Jesus does not provide for the family financially without her help. His small salary from selling one manzana of coffee and several more manzanas of other crops only partly covers the family's expenses. Nohemi contributes financially with the sale of bread and eggs at the venta (and she will eventually contribute with the sale of her prized pig at market). Jesus has an opinion about Nohemi's role as the only female in the household, too. In his opinion, she should cook and clean, wash laundry, and care for the children. Nohemi performs these tasks and even enjoys her role as caretaker, but defies Jesus' ideas about gender roles—Nohemi requires her sons to help out with household chores, which are usually reserved for women. I would guess that Jesus and Nohemi have different ideas about the gender roles in place, but Jesus' opinion is the dominant one since he is the male head-of-household. If I had only stayed with Jesus' and Nohemi's family, I would assume that these ideas about gender roles were the dominant ones in Peñas Blancas; but actually in my experiences with other families I witnessed a variety of attitudes about gender.

Second Family: Don (Francisco) Chico and Doña Julia

After two weeks with Don Jesus and Nohemi's family, I returned to Don Chico's and Doña Julia's home located along the carretera and much closer to the cooperative. I had eaten my first meal in Peñas Blancas in Doña Julia's kitchen and so knew the family a little bit already. Don Chico and Doña Julia are in their mid-seventies. Unlike most couples in Peñas Blancas, they

were married 40 years earlier and actually celebrated their anniversary while I was staying with their family. They chose to marry while they were both in their early to mid-30s and then had nine children together.

Francesca is the oldest child (age 42), followed by Ulysse, Miriam, Maria, Arturo (age 36), Orlando, Bayardo, Corina (age 29), and Abraham (age 25)[12]. Francesca and her teenage son, Julio, live with Don Chico and Doña Julia; Corina and her six-year-old daughter, Dariana, also live with the family. I never met Ulysse because he lives in the city and runs a distribution center there. He is married and has four children. Miriam lives along the carretera and visits Don Chico and Doña Julia at least weekly. She bakes specialty breads in the kitchen, which Doña Julia later sells in the venta. Miriam is also married and has four children. Maria is married with two children and lives somewhere in the mountains of Peñas Blancas. I met her once in passing, but she hardly visits the family. Arturo is married to Edelma, and the couple has a two-year-old son, Maudial. Arturo is a cooperative member and also participates in the rural tourism project (I stayed with Arturo and Edelma, and I write about that experience later). Orlando was President of GARBO cooperative for two years previous to my experience in the community. He lives in a house next to Don Chico and Doña Julia, but his wife and four children live in the city where education is better and more accessible. Orlando spends most weekends away from Peñas Blancas with his family in the city[13]. Bayardo lives farther up the mountainside with his wife and two children. He often helps Don Chico with tasks on the farm and around the house. And finally, Abraham is the youngest of Don Chico's and Doña Julia's children. He is also a cooperative member and lives across from his parents with his wife and three-year-old son,

[12] I only have some information about specific ages. I gathered this information at different times through specific conversations with individuals, and I didn't have conversations with every member of Don Chico's family.
[13] Orlando's family was also part of the tourism project until recently when they moved to the city.

Angél. The (Francisco) Cruz family is extensive. Most of the family members live and work with the coffee cooperative and tourism project in Peñas Blancas.

I enjoyed spending much of my time at Don Chico's in the kitchen with Francesca. As the oldest child, Francesca was named after her father, Don Francisco (Chico) Cruz. She reminds me of him, too, in the way that she repeats the words people say to her, as if to clarify them, and smiles with her eyes more than her lips. Francesca is always in the kitchen, preparing meals or grinding coffee by hand. She doesn't say much usually, but she always asked me how I was doing and cared about the answer. She is quiet but intuitive, and she always seems to be aware of what everyone needs without asking first. Francesca provides for everyone as though she is their mother, whether she is caring for her parents, her siblings, or visiting tourists.

Eventually Francesca discovered my food preferences, because somehow she pays attention to everything without it being noticed. I prefer tea to coffee, I love fruit for breakfast, I like warm milk in place of water with pinolillo mix (a traditional drink in Nicaragua made from cornmeal and cacao, ground into a powder and mixed with water usually), and I can usually finish my plate, if I receive about half of the food usually served to a man. Presumably, some of these preferences she knew already because she has several years of experience serving tourists who visit her home.

Participation in the rural tourism project boosts the (Francisco Cruz) family's income substantially in comparison to other families involved in the project. The family's comedor receives all hungry visitors. Their home also receives most tourists who do not stay in the eco-albergue because their house is located closest to the cooperative. Other families involved in the project complain that they do not receive similar benefits from tourism. Their more secluded locations largely discourage tourism in those parts, because it is difficult for a tourist to travel a

mile into the forest and only stay one night with a family and without many of the amenities they would receive in the cooperative eco-albergue or in Don Chico's home. Further, according to some families, the cooperative does not properly organize tourist visits or try to distribute them equally among families.

Don Chico's family is notably more affluent than Jesus and Nohemi. For example, there is a larger variety of fruits and vegetables in the kitchen. Francesca serves fruits and vegetables that she purchases at the market, like mangos, pineapple, jocote, cabbage, tomatoes, pipián, and yucca. She also serves fresh cow's milk, *cuajada* (wet cheese made from cow's milk), and homemade marmalade. Sometimes, when there are other tourists at Don Chico's, Francesca prepares really special items like homemade French fries and "margarita"-style pizza with tomatoes, cilantro, and cuajada. The family also enjoys electricity, wooden and cement floors, phone signal on the rooftop, extra bedrooms for tourists, and a new letrina designed to suit tourists' needs with a plastic toilet seat and metal door with a lock. Several of Don Chico's sons own motorcycles for easy travel, and the family owns a small truck for taking trips into the city.

Doña Julia and Francesca also work in the family venta that is attached to the home and next to the comedor. They sell bottled water, Coca Cola products, fruit drinks, homemade ice-cream and bread, dried pasta, toothbrushes, toilet paper, and other basic items that residents and tourists purchase on a regular basis. The store brings additional income into their home and contributes to the family's greater affluence in comparison with the first and other families.

Don Chico's family lives in a large, two-story home with three bedrooms for family members and three reserved for tourists. A sign outside the kitchen indicates the comedor, "El Comedor de Don Chico," where I ate during my first night in the community. Many tourists and community members dine there for 50 còrdobas ($US 2). A garden exhibits colorful flowers that

grow in recycled tin cans and plastic bottles, and a hammock sways on the patio. In the afternoon, men sit in a small and mostly empty living room. They watch hopelessly romantic *telenovelas* (soap operas) while the women cook in the kitchen. A covered picnic table sits in the kitchen next to a wood-burning stovetop and built-in countertops. There is running water, as in the first household. Later during my visit, Don Chico installed another spout with running purified water. This addition is another modification for tourists who often require purified drinking and cooking water.

Upstairs I lived in my own room: a small space with a cot-like bed and mattress, a bug net, a window with a view of the white rocks, a metal desk, and a chair. I roomed next to Lucie, a French graduate student who also stayed with the family. She had a larger room with a wooden bed frame and mattress because she stayed with the family longer than me and therefore required better accomodations. Lucie was studying the relationship between natural landscape, the nature reserve, and agricultural production throughout the whole area of Peñas Blancas. She planned to stay with Don Chico because his home offers a set-up for foreign researchers and students. Another researcher in her program had previously stayed with the family for eight months, so Don Chico's family had the experience and accommodations she needed.

Lucie's presence in the house made my experience with Don Chico's family very different from the first experience. We were often treated as partners, although our projects were very different and mostly unrelated. We were served meals together, expected to know where the other was at all times, and allowed to leave the house "alone" if we were together. Although English is not Lucie's first language, she speaks it fluently, so we sometimes spoke English together to talk about the parts of our cultures that we missed (traditional foods, our families, and hot showers mostly). We also talked about the more complicated parts of our respective projects.

It was tempting to speak English with Lucie because the family did not understand. We could talk about things that were frustrating or irritating for a foreigner living in the mountains without upsetting the family. Or one of us could relay hearsay that we learned that day from the women in the kitchen. However, I felt uncomfortable speaking English while family members lingered close-by because they couldn't understand. Again I was demonstrating my difference and perhaps linguistic privilege that allowed me to say secretive things out loud. The family didn't have this privilege, to talk out loud about the strange tourists inhabiting their home, because Lucie and I could understand (and presumably it's impolite to talk about someone while they are listening).

One day, Lucie and I were invited by Orlando and Arturo to help with the potato harvest in Don Chico's fields. Harvest is largely a family and community effort because Don Chico owns a lot of land. Don Chico is an older man, too, and so he participates in less strenuous tasks (though still strenuous) like milking cows and chopping wood, while his sons work in the fields.

One week earlier, I had planted potatoes with Don Jesus. Now I would learn how to harvest them. Don Chico's field had been planted two months earlier and fertilized with a similar seed that Jesus used. Lucie and I were not given protective gloves this time. Instead we received an L-shaped digging tool, that Arturo had hand-crafted from a special-looking tree branch. Orlando advised us to pull the dried and limp plant which indicated that the potatoes were ready to be harvested. Then he showed us how to dig with the L-shaped tool, or rather how to move dirt around until we had a handful of fat potatoes. Each plant produced about seven or eight healthy potatoes. The unhealthy ones were tossed aside so not to be mistakenly added to the pile for export. The last step was to fill potato sacks that reached up to my waist with the healthy potatoes. Then someone, usually one of the strong teenage boys, lugged the full potato sacks to a

pile in the shade. There they were ready to be picked up and taken to the market. The tasks functioned like an assembly line: several people dug potatoes, others filled the bags, and then young boys carried the heavy sacks to the pile. Again, Lucie and I were the only female workers, so we were watched very closely.

Before the work began, I felt naively confident that pulling potatoes would be easier than planting them, because how could it be worse? Five minutes later, my hands were already bubbling with blisters and my lower back was sunburnt. Lucie and I worked from 7 A.M. to 12 P.M., and for the rest of the day and even days afterword, we recuperated from the experience. I rubbed aloe on my back and enjoyed the cold bath water for the first time. I even took a break from writing extensive field notes for several days for fear that a painful blister would burst on my right hand. Again I learned that fieldwork in Peñas Blancas, especially along the mountainside, is extremely challenging. Lucie agreed.

Lucie's presence in the house changed my experience with the family, both positively (allowing me someone to relate to and travel with) and negatively (prompting me to speak English while I should have been practicing Spanish). There were other factors that differentiated this experience from the other ones, too. Don Chico's family has the most experience with foreign people and tourists. They have been hosting guests since 2003 when the project started because they had the financial ability for it then and were located closest to the cooperative. My experience in Don Chico's home is more likely the one that other tourists have when they visit the cooperative. However, because of my longer stay in Peñas Blancas, I enjoyed relationships and hands-on work that regular tourists might not experience. For example, a tourist who visits for several days probably won't meet as many family members, develop relationships with them, or have the opportunity to pull potatoes in the fields.

The family's experience with tourists allowed them to know even before I arrived about my preferences as a person from outside the community. For example, Francesca assumed that I would probably want to eat fruits and vegetables more often than the family normally does, so she served me fruit plates and carrot juice. However, although they served these items to me and Lucie, Don Chico and his family only ate fresh fruits and vegetables from the market occasionally. They maintained their diet of mostly rice and beans, cooked vegetables, and few fruits.

One day I was writing about the irony that the family only changes its diet for tourists who visit the cooperative. At the same time, a truck driver named Miguel stopped at the comedor and asked what I was doing in Peñas Blancas. Apparently I looked out of the ordinary, and he hadn't seen me before anyway. Miguel buys and sells vegetables and fruits throughout Central America and the United States. Sometimes he stops at Doña Julia's for a quick meal before he continues to a produce market in the north. We only spoke for a few minutes, but Miguel offered a critical reflection about my project in the mountains. I told him that I was studying coffee certification and rural tourism in the area, and he replied, "There can't be a lot of tourism around here, right? It's not very accommodating." I explained that GARBO invites tourists to experience Nicaragua in a different way without many of the amenities they might find in another tourist destination, like Granada for example. Still, the project is young, I said. "One of the problems with tourism up here must be the difficulty of providing a familiar variety of fruits and vegetables that tourists like to eat," Miguel continued, "Foreign people aren't used to the same diet." I smiled, because Miguel was right. As much as I wanted to only require the normal, local diet, I missed fruits and vegetables that made up my diet at home. And surely other tourists would expect (or appreciate at least) a larger variety of fresh produce that is familiar to them.

"Yes," I started, "But fresh fruits and vegetables that I'm used to are scarce in Peñas Blancas, especially during the off-season. And not all of the families can afford to buy them anyway." Miguel raised his eyebrows. "Ah, and that's the irony isn't it? The life and diet here have to change in order to suit visitors—but visitors actually think they are experiencing a way of life that always has been. They think life up here remains unchanged." Yes, I thought. Regardless of the benefits of tourism in Peñas Blancas, it also changes the lives of local residents.

I witnessed other changes for tourists in Don Chico's home. For example, Don Chico's family provides purified water for tourists, whether from the new spout in the sink or from bottled water sold in the venta. Throughout three months with the cooperative, I watched Don Chico change his home in preparation to host a greater number of tourists. He added another bedroom (now four bedrooms for tourists and three for the family), built a "tooth-brushing" sink on the patio, and made the bathing area more private and secure for tourists' comfort. When I returned for a few weeks in July, Don Chico proudly showed me a gas-oven and stove placed oddly next to the wood-burning one. This was a gift from his son who lives and works as a distributor of goods in the city. Don Chico hopes that it will be helpful to Doña Julia and Francesca in the kitchen. His family especially is changing with the increase of tourism in Peñas Blancas.

The family's constant participation in tourism introduced me to many foreign people visiting the cooperative. Most of them stayed for one or two nights in the eco-albergue, but a few people stayed at the house[14]. I met a group of U.S.-American and British tourists traveling through Peñas Blancas. They spoke as though Peñas Blancas was only another place to cross off their list before going somewhere more exciting. They hiked into the reserve with guides from CEN, bunked for one night in the eco-albergue, and then complained that breakfast wasn't

[14] During my time at the cooperative (March-May, 2013), no one stayed with any family but Don Chico's.

prepared for them early enough in the morning (they woke at 6 A.M. before Francesca had even started the fire). Both Lucie and I felt defensive of "our" family—how dare these tourists come into our home and expect special treatment.

Another tourist from Holland showed up at the cooperative for several days on another occasion. He stayed at the eco-albergue at night and ventured into the reserve with guides from CEN during the day. He didn't speak Spanish, but he tried to. No one at GARBO speaks a language other than Spanish, so it's important that visitors know enough Spanish at least to communicate. Sometimes Lucie helped by translating from Spanish to English or French so that he could understand, but this is not a luxury afforded to all non-Spanish speaking tourists—Lucie will not always be there to translate.

One night I was chatting with Lucie and the tourist as we warmed by the fire in Doña Julia's kitchen. Doña Julia was toasting cacao in a giant metal cauldron with a long-handled wooden spoon. When the beans had cooked long enough and cooled for several minutes, Doña Julia dumped them onto the table in front of us and asked if we would help remove the burnt outsides, leaving only the pure cacao bean inside. Don Chico sat down to help, too, his big hands delicately removing cacao shells better than the rest of us. The beans were hot and nearly burned my hands. They tasted very bitter without sugar, like European chocolate Lucie said. When the beans were shelled, Don Chico took turns with Francesca, grinding them with the metal hand grinder usually used to grind coffee or tortilla dough. When the mixture was ground into a fine powder and added to ground, roasted corn, Doña Julia added a generous amount of sugar and set it aside to make pinolillo with breakfast the next morning.

Another tourist couple traveled into the area after hearing about it from friends. They stayed for several days to enjoy most of their time hiking in the reserve or alone in the

matrimonial suite. The man was from the United States, white-haired and in his early 50's. The woman was younger and Nicaraguan. They shared conversations of broken Spanish and English, and explained that they were finally headed to the U.S. to be married soon. They had been working with the Embassy to obtain a fiancé visa for more than a year. One night during their visit while all of the foreign people (including myself and Lucie) were sharing a meal at Doña Julia's, Don Chico waltzed into the room playing *marimba*-like music on a ukulele. Everyone smiled and clapped at the surprising sight of Don Chico, with his big and rough hands gracefully strumming a delicate instrument. He explained that he had taught himself to play music. A tourist had left a used music teaching manual behind several years before, so Don Chico used it to teach himself to play the ukulele.

Don Chico (and presumably Doña Julia, although I never spoke to her about this) is educated, at least enough to read, write, perform basic math, and learn music. Once I saw him with reading glasses at the table in the kitchen. He was reading a brochure for tourist activities in Peñas Blancas. The levels of education in this household and the support for it are notably different than in the first house. Several of Don Chico's children attended university—Corina had studied for several years in the city, and Abraham was just returning from earning his degree in agricultural sciences. Corina now teaches classes to kindergarten students, and Abraham is experimenting with organic production methods that he learned at university. He is working with cooperative members to create the possibility for organic production in Peñas Blancas.

Summary of "Second Family"

A different level and value of education is only one difference between the first and second households. There are also differences in family size and male-to-female ratio, which

both contribute to a difference in financial stability and male and female relationships in the household.

Don Chico's family is one of the largest in the community. He and Doña Julia have nine children and many more grandchildren. They have more family members to work in the kitchen and in the fields, which allows for their family's greater economic prosperity. Having more females in the kitchen also seems to lessen the strain on one woman to perform all of the household tasks. Don Chico's family demonstrates a different idea about gender roles because women are respected as caretakers. Don Chico appreciates his clean laundry and says thank you at mealtimes. Doña Julia's sons also appreciate their meals in her kitchen and at least bring their plates to the sink. Gender roles are still in place, because women perform household tasks and men work in the fields, but each role is respected. Occasionally the roles are even reversed—for example, Don Chico sweeps the kitchen sometimes and helps make coffee in the morning. Other times, Doña Julia milks the cows.

The family's participation in rural tourism also contributes to their greater economic prosperity. Their relationship to tourism is mutually reinforcing because participation in tourism contributes to increased financial stability, but financial stability also allows for greater participation in tourism. Don Chico's family receives most of the tourists that come to Peñas Blancas, and therefore has more experience working with them. This also allows Don Chico the (financial) resources and knowledge to make changes to his home suitable for tourists. My experience at Don Chico's is probably most like the one that a normal tourist would have, because that's where most tourists stay.

Importantly, rural tourism is changing Peñas Blancas. Don Chico is changing things in his home to suit the special needs of tourists by building additional rooms, constructing a new

letrina and bathing area, and installing a water purification system. Some of these changes also benefit the family (like the bathing area and purified water); but the important point here is that tourism changes everyday life for families in Peñas Blancas. Although tourists think they are entering an unchanged environment, their very presence changes the experience.

Third Family: Don Marcial and Doña Sofia

I left Don Chico's house on Easter Sunday and headed to Managua to meet my family a few days later. My mother, sister, and cousin visited me in Nicaragua for my birthday in April. We traveled to Granada, Masaya, Volcán Mombachu, la Laguna de Apoyo, Managua, and Leòn. We stayed in hotels with many more amenities that I was used to in the mountains and explored the country as regular tourists. We hiked a mountain trail, toured a cacao farm where we tasted raw cacao beans, made chocolate bars in the city, and relaxed at la Laguna de Apoyo.

Granada is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Nicaragua, but I felt uncomfortable there. The city offers nice hotels with fancy restaurants and English-speaking tourist guides. These amenities are supposed to make a foreign person feel more comfortable, but I felt less comfortable in Granada than in the mountains. I was only a tourist in the city and never a guest; I never spoke with local people or shared a meal with them. I was an outsider there.

After my family left Nicaragua, I returned to Peñas Blancas with new reflections about tourism. Was I just a tourist at the cooperative? How was my experience in the mountains different from my experience in Granada? Could these forms of tourism have separate names? Was "rural tourism" the right name for tourism in the Peñas Blancas? Some tourists at the cooperative still arrived expecting comfortable living situations separate from the families, but still they were classified as rural tourists. Was I different from these tourists? Could I be called a

"rural tourist," or was it something else? I was all of the things that a regular tourist was—a foreigner, an outsider, a Westerner—but I struggled to find a category that explained how I was different, or if I was any different.

When I returned to Peñas Blancas, I stayed with Don Chico's family for a few days before I was able to contact Don Marcial. I offered to pay for my additional time with Don Chico's family, at least for the meals, but Doña Julia wouldn't accept my money. "That's not how we are in Nicaragua, Alycia. You will learn, eventually. I feed you because I'm happy to do it. We enjoy hosting you."

Don Marcial met me at the cooperative and carried my bags to the bus stop (Doña Julia let me store my larger luggage in one of her bedrooms so that I wouldn't have to lug my heaviest things through the forest again). Out of all of the families involved in the GARBO tourism project, Don Marcial's family lives farthest away from the cooperative. His home is situated about 10 minutes down the carretera from Don Chico's by bus. Don Marcial owns 30 manzanas of land and grows coffee, beans, corn, plantains, and bananas. His three sons each own additional land, and although they are not members of GARBO, the family certifies and sells all of their coffee through the cooperative. They work the land together and reap its benefits together. The family cultivates a type of coffee that is not affected by la roya—their faraway location at a lower altitude allows them to grow a different kind of coffee and even cacao. Don Marcial and his wife, Doña Sofia, also raise several heads of cattle, two or three piglets, chickens, ducks, and geese. The family purchases milk from a neighbor.

Doña Sofia met me outside with a kiss and invited me into her home. She is 63-years-old, four years older than her husband. You wouldn't guess either of their ages from their impressive strength and stamina—both of them practically run up and down the mountainside. I met Don

Marcial's and Doña Sofia's three sons: José Marcial, Bismark, and Miguel Angél. Then I was introduced to José Marcial's wife, Arlena, and their son Angelito. Angelito's curly ringlets bounced as he playfully teased the kittens. Miguel Angél introduced me to his wife, Aurora, and their sons, seven-year-old Carlitos and two-year-old Auner. Carlitos and Auner were more timid to take my hand and immediately hid behind their mother.

Later I met teenagers Milena and Victor, Doña Sofia's grandchildren from a previous relationship. Milena is a beautiful young girl, not yet an adult at age 15. She has beautiful, tanned skin and bright green eyes. She loves living in Peñas Blancas, she told me later, and hopes to live there after attending college in the city (although she doesn't have a major picked out yet). Victor resembles Milena, but he is several years younger and much more of a sneaky troublemaker. He likes to tease the younger children and torture the kittens by swinging them into the air. Milena explained to me that she and Victor are cousins. They both chose to live with Don Marcial and Doña Sofia several years before because life is better in the mountains.

Unlike other families in the community, Don Marcial's family is originally from Estelí. They moved to Peñas Blancas in 1991 and bought several manzanas of land to begin a life for themselves in a new place. Now the 12-member family lives in a large house with six bedrooms. The kitchen has two stoves, one for boiling corn and water and the other for general cooking. There is no sink with running water inside the kitchen; instead, one of the daughters-in-law fetches buckets of water from the bathing area every morning, afternoon, and night. A picnic table sits in one corner of the kitchen. This is where I ate most of my meals and wrote many of my field notes. Don Marcial explained to me on the first day that I shouldn't feel unwelcome if I happened to eat alone at this table. "I know that it's different in the United States," he said, "but

in Nicaragua and in our home, family members often eat at different times, whenever there is food."

In the living area there is a hammock strung across the middle of the room, directly in front of two TV screens. Wooden benches surround the room so that all 12 family members can watch the same TV show after dinner. Outside the living area another picnic table sits in a covered patio. I did most of my interviews with the family here because it is comfortable and lit by a bright electric lamp.

The bedroom set-up at Don Marcial's is different from every other household. He explained that if I were more comfortable inside the home, the family could arrange one of their own bedrooms for me. Otherwise, I would stay in a cabin several yards away from the home. Don Marcial had built it specifically for hosting tourists. The cabin is raised from the ground and connects to an unfinished barn behind the house. It looks out over rolling mountain hills and a beautiful sunset in the late afternoon. Inside there are four handmade, wooden bedframes. Each one has a thin mattress and a covered pillow. Doña Sofia let me choose the bed that I preferred and then tucked warm blankets around the mattress. Warm blankets are less necessary in this part of the mountain because the lower altitude allows for warmer weather. I adored that part of the experience at Don Marcial's. Even the rain is warmer there, and the sun peeks from behind cloud cover more frequently. Don Marcial showed me two electric outlets on the ceiling of the cabin and reminded me to close and lock the door when I wasn't occupying the space[15].

Outside, Don Marcial pointed to a letrina that looked much like the one at Don Chico's house. I learned that this style of letrina was designed specifically for tourists because I was the only one who used it. The family uses a separate outhouse on the other side of the house. Don

[15] Community members seemed oddly concerned about locking their homes and personal items since they are widely spaced apart; I never learned or fully understood the reason for this.

Marcial also showed me the bathing area: a large room with a spot for hanging clothes and a washing area with buckets and soap. A plastic pipe extends from a spout that turns cold water on and off. Don Marcial explained that he hoped to make improvements to both the letrina and the bathing area because neither is suitable yet. "What do you mean?" I asked, "They're clean and comfortable even." Don Marcial dropped the dried coffee beans he had been rubbing between his hands and replied, "Oh, well they're suitable for us, of course, but I'm talking about the tourists. They come from more comfortable lifestyles and so expect better bathrooms."

Don Marcial's family actively participates in the tourism project with GARBO, but they also hope to increase the number of tourists who visit their home specifically. Don Marcial has already built a cabin for tourists, and he hopes to make other changes to his home by improving the letrina and bathing area. Don Marcial also talked about placing a sign by the carretera in front of his property to invite tourists to stay in his home or stop by for meals.

The food at Doña Sofia's house made me fat, and she liked to point that out. "I fattened her up! And you know, actually, the girl likes to eat. Or at least she likes to eat my food," Doña Sofia bragged to other women in the cooperative. The food in her home was delicious, and I did like to eat it. I fell in love with *café con leche* (coffee with milk), and drank some every morning. Doña Sofia toasted tortillas so that they were crispy and slightly burnt because we both loved to snack on those, sometimes with a portion of cuajada. Aurora's specialty was rolled chicken tacos covered with coleslaw and ketchup (it sounds stranger than it tastes). The women always served me too much of everything, but I ate it all anyway.

One day the women made my favorite Nicaraguan specialty, chicken soup. Early in the morning, I found a dead chicken lying upside down in a bucket in the living room. "Why is there a chicken in a bucket?" I asked, nervous about the answer. Aurora answered timidly and with a

smile, as though she expected my response already. "That's a dead chicken," she said, "And that's what we're having for lunch." Doña Sofia plopped the chicken into a pot of boiling water. After a few minutes, I watched as she removed the chicken and plucked its feathers, shrinking its body size by about half. The kitten danced around, playfully batting at the falling feathers. A younger and unknowing chicken plucked at the ground, eating remnants of her dead chicken friend. I grabbed my camera but couldn't bear to take a picture of the chicken's naked and exposed body. I watched, stared, and tried not to remember why I had become vegetarian, even though I no longer was[16]. When all the feathers were plucked, Doña Sofia started cutting the chicken into pieces so it would cook more easily into soup. At this point I decided that watching *Dora and Diego* on Nickelodeon with the little ones was more appropriate for my viewing capabilities, so I waited patiently for the soup to finish. It was made with one of the house chickens, a variety of starchy vegetables (like potatoes, yucca, and quequisque), and a Maggie spice packet[17].

During one afternoon, Arlena invited me on a walk to the venta with her son Angelito. Along the way, we talked about my family in the United States and my experiences with families in Nicaragua. Arlena commented that families in the United States are very different from families in Nicaragua. "For example," she explained, "It's uncommon in the United States for sons and daughters to live with their parents after they are coupled and having children—or even before that, like in your situation. But that's normal in Nicaragua."

[16] I came to Nicaragua nervous about remaining a vegetarian during my time abroad. Even in the city I was challenged to find a plate without fried or broiled chicken, and often the only salad option was coleslaw with cabbage and carrots. I prepared my own meals in the city, stir frying vegetables with rice, baking potatoes, and boiling red beets; but in the mountains, I could not prepare my meals, or even control what was prepared for me, so I relied entirely on my host families for that. Meat is not overly common in the farming family's diets, but chicken soup at least is a specialty item. And I felt uncomfortable refusing any kind of food the families prepared, so I started eating chicken in the mountains, for both convenience and social formality.

[17] Maggie soup and spice packets are a modern invention that stems from mass production in the First World. See Milton for an eloquent reflection about the influence of First World products in developing communities.

Arlena told me about how she fell in love with José Marcial as we started back from the venta. She was only 15-years-old when they met while picking coffee in the fields. A year later, Arlena decided to leave her mother's home and come to live with José Marcial because she was pregnant with Angelito. She still lives with Don Marcial's family and visits her mother sometimes on the weekends.

Both Arlena and Aurora expressed greater confidence with me than with previous male tourists. Arlena explained that she felt more comfortable asking and answering personal questions with a female companion. Aurora also said that she found it easier and more natural to speak with another female than with a male (interview with Aurora). Together we shared many conversations, mostly about the differences between familial relationships in Nicaragua and in the United States.

When my boyfriend, Elvin, came to visit a few weeks later, I noticed that the women talked less and appeared more hesitant to laugh at my bad jokes and botched Spanish. They were timid with Elvin and hardly spoke to me when we were together, until the last day when they began to feel more comfortable. They sent us back to Masaya with a few dozen eggs, a live chicken, and an invitation to return.

I noticed that my relationship with the men changed during Elvin's visit also. Normally we struggled to understand each other in conversations with more technical farming vocabulary, but the men would explain their words more simply or I would search for them in my dictionary. When Elvin came to visit, they all spoke easily about things on the farm and in the cooperative (and other things, like sports) because Spanish is Elvin's first language, too. When I failed to understand parts of their conversations, the men looked to Elvin for translation, even though we had managed conversations before without Spanish-to-English translation. Similar to my

experience with Lucie at Don Chico's, having a companion changed my experience with the family.

In Don Marcial's and Doña Sofia's home, I was allowed more freedom than with other families. Sometimes I was allowed to walk along the carretera alone to search for phone signal or buy gum at the venta. Other times a family member would accompany me. One day, Doña Sofia accompanied me on a visit to Don Chico's house. The trip is more quickly taken by bus (about seven or eight minutes uphill), but Doña Sofia prefers the trip by foot because it is more beautiful that way. (Also, the bus only comes every two or three hours, and it's annoying to plan every trip into the mountains on this schedule.) We started up the hill at an easy pace, but somewhere after the first few minutes, Doña Sofia lost me. I was hiking as fast as my lungs would allow, and still the 63-year-old grandmother was bounds ahead of me. She took breaks in the time spent waiting for me to catch up, but whenever I reached her resting place, she started walking again. "We're making good time," she hollered down to me, as if I cared about that. I was already exhausted and we were hardly halfway there.

Doña Sofia is different from other women in the community. Maybe this is because she knows other parts of Nicaragua (Estelí) or because she is allowed more freedom from the kitchen with other women to share the chores. Doña Sofia leaves the house often, sometimes alone. Every Saturday she travels alone to La Dalia to purchase produce at the market. The bus driver and ticket-takers know her by name and gladly carry her heavy bags of flour, cabbage, melons, and pineapple onto the roof of the bus. Doña Sofia explained to me that she likes to get out of the house because she enjoys being outside and trekking up and down the mountain hills—plus, walking is great exercise.

When we reached Don Chico's home, Doña Sofia let us rest long enough to share a refreshing fruit drink and a short conversation with Francesca in the comedor. She purchased several homemade ice-creams to eat on our way back, and we started hiking again (this time downhill, thank goodness).

As we walked past the cooperative's eco-albergue, I noticed men in white protective gear and gas masks fumigating a coffee field marked "Property certified by FLO-CERT and Starbucks." Many of the farmers had already been affected by la roya, so the cooperative was apparently taking measures to prevent the plant disease from further infecting next year's harvest. I understood the necessity of drastic preventative measures that would hopefully save next year's crop most efficiently and cheaply. However, I wondered why Fair Trade organizations and certifiers weren't helping the cooperative avoid the use of chemicals, if they even knew that la roya was a problem. And why hadn't they helped the cooperative avoid the disease in the first place? Doña Sofia and I continued walking, but I could taste the toxic fumes in my ice-cream.

Later, Don Marcial answered my questions about Fair Trade certification. He didn't know why Fair Trade organizations weren't more involved with the cooperative, or even if that was an option, but he explained the process of certification for both FLO-CERT and Starbucks. Apparently the certification processes and even the guidelines of each are similar[18]. Last year, one of the certifiers came to Don Marcial's farm, so he explained the process to me. Once per year, a certifying person from both FLO-CERT and Starbucks visits the cooperative to give or take away certification based on a list of qualifications that the farmers know about. This person visits a random selection of four farms and decides whether or not the whole cooperative can

[18] I can only make this claim based on the firsthand accounts of the farmers who have experience working with both of them; I have not examined the documents myself, or at least not thoroughly enough.

receive certification based on these evaluations. The certifier spends four days evaluating all four farms. Don Marcial said that the certifier never asked to see his fields of coffee, but instead reviewed the barn where he keeps tools and fertilizer seed and Doña Sofia's kitchen. I don't understand why a review of the kitchen in the farmer's home is necessary, but Don Marcial says that it doesn't matter—he has nothing to hide because he knows the rules and he follows them. Certification is important to Don Marcial and his family because it provides a usually higher price for the coffee bean (interview with Miguel Angél).

Don Marcial explained that GARBO used to work with a different certifier before it received Fair Trade and Starbucks certification. However, that certifier changed its standards to only purchase organically-grown coffee. The transition to organic-only production would have been too difficult and expensive for GARBO, so the cooperative instead sought new certification with FLO-CERT and Starbucks. Significantly, the search did not happen with certifiers seeking producers. Orlando, who was President of GARBO during the time of my research (March-May 2013), later explained that GARBO reached out to find FLO-CERT and Starbucks certification after the 2001 coffee crisis.

Both FLO-CERT and Starbucks only certify and do not purchase coffee directly from the cooperative. They do not provide access to or stimulate relationships between certified buyers and the cooperative either. Both certifiers only give a list of certified cooperatives to the buyers and sellers of coffee. Importantly, FLO-CERT and Starbucks certification each cost $4,000 annually ($8,000 for both) and do not guarantee a market for certified coffee (i.e. they do not guarantee that someone will buy the coffee once it is certified). Orlando explained that GARBO cooperative generally sells about half of its coffee on the Fair Trade market to Green Mountain

Coffee Roasters and another European company. They sell the other half on the conventional market and lose the Fair Trade premium ($20 per quintal).

Orlando claimed that the biggest problem with Fair Trade and Starbucks certification is not having direct access to buyers of certified coffee. During two years as President of GARBO, Orlando worked to find and secure access to a direct buyer—luckily a direct buyer from Europe found GARBO and showed an interest in forming a long-term relationship with them in 2012. At the time of our conversation, GARBO was still in contact with this (unnamed) potential buyer, but Orlando was hopeful that the buyer would soon sign a contract with the cooperative to annually purchase the half of its coffee crop not currently sold on the Fair Trade market.

Don Marcial disagreed that the cooperative's biggest problem is obtaining direct access to the market. Instead, he claimed that a more important challenge is finding banks or other funding institutions that would give farmers a good credit rate for short-term loans. Money is the cooperative's largest concern, Don Marcial said, because it determines whether or not the cooperative can afford the conversion to organic production, pay for and maintain certification, and introduce a greater number of educational workshops and training programs for the community. If the cooperative provided credit to farmers, farmers could more easily achieve financial stability to sustain themselves without the worry of finding a direct buyer.

Maria raised another critical concern: Fair Trade and Starbucks certified coffee, on whatever market it is sold, actually does not receive a better price than non-certified coffee. She claims that the $20 per quintal Fair Trade premium never arrives at the cooperative, let alone to its members. She thinks that the premium, if there is one, probably stays with the second-tier cooperative which acts as an intermediary. GARBO and five other small cooperatives work together under a second-tier cooperative because they are too small to be recognized alone.

Maria says that this hierarchical organization looks a lot (or too much) like the conventional trade that GARBO is trying to escape[19].

On one of my last days with the family, I attended a meeting of the cooperative with Don Marcial and Doña Sofia. I found Nohemi at the meeting and asked about her family. I also stopped by Don Chico's venta to purchase a snack. I enjoyed keeping in touch with the families even after I no longer lived with them. At this meeting, the cooperative was electing a new leadership team because the two-year terms of their officers were nearly over. Before the election, Orlando and several other leaders explained the leadership structure. All leadership positions are unpaid and require many hours of dedicated volunteer time. GARBO cooperative does not earn enough money to offer salaried leadership positions yet. Apparently other cooperatives that are larger have administrative teams that receive (at least a small) salary which provides both an incentive for members to participate and compensation for the heavy workload. These cooperatives clearly have more money and resources than GARBO. All or most of the leadership tasks at GARBO also require competence in reading and writing, and computer skills are helpful. Therefore members like Jesus and Nohemi cannot serve on the leadership team.

The elections lasted for several hours, partly because few members volunteered to take leadership roles. Don Virgilio Cruz (whose family I stayed with next) stood up to suggest that more cooperative members outside the Cruz family volunteer for at least minor roles—leadership has previously been only or mostly members of the Cruz family. Don Virgilio explained that if nothing else, a leadership team of only family members was bad for publicity. Eventually Don Freddy (not a member of the Cruz family) accepted the role of President because no one else volunteered. He had been President the term before Orlando. Orlando reluctantly accepted the

[19] I cannot confirm whether or not GARBO and its members actually receive the Fair Trade premium; but I can say that of the families I interviewed, none of them understood what I was talking about when I asked about the premium.

role of Vice President, again because no one else volunteered. Three additional men and one woman took other leadership roles, and the meeting was dismissed.

Summary of "Third Family"

My experience with Don Marcial's family continued to teach me about my role as a tourist in Peñas Blancas. Extended time in the community allowed me to see that my experience was different from what is normally experienced by tourists—but still I was considered some kind of guest in the community. I continued to observe the changes induced by rural tourism in Peñas Blancas. Like Don Chico, Don Marcial is adding amenities to his home that will better suit tourists. He has already built a cabin for them, and he has plans to build a new letrina and bathing area for tourists' comfort. Don Marcial plans to expand the tourism project by increasing the number of tourists who visit his home specifically.

I continued to learn about Fair Trade and Starbucks certification of coffee at GARBO cooperative. According to farmers, FLO-CERT certification is not strikingly different from Starbucks certification. Each charges $4,000 per year for its label, and neither one stimulates a relationship between the cooperative and prospective buyers, provides direct access to the Fair Trade market, or facilitates a relationship with credit-granting institutions in the area. Production is not completely organic, and there is no guarantee that the Fair Trade premium will reach farmers. The requirements for each certification are largely the same.

During two weeks with Don Marcial's family, I observed the family's greater affluence (in comparison to the first family) exemplified by their large home and varied diet. I also spoke with the family about the differences between families in the United States and in Nicaragua. As a woman, I was more easily able to form strong relationships with other women in the household than a male researcher might. For example, I spoke easily with Aurora and Arlena about a

variety of personal things because they expressed greater trust with another female. In following weeks, I observed a similar experience with other women.

Fourth Family: Don Virgilio and Doña Isabel

Don Virgilio is Jesus' older brother, and Don Chico is their uncle. All three are members of the Cruz family. Virgilio's wife (Doña Isabel) and Nohemi are first cousins. They no longer speak to each other for reasons that were never shared with me. These connections between Jesus' and Virgilio's families made my experiences with them awkward sometimes, because the women talked poorly of each other. They hadn't seen each other in several years apparently, yet there was still unfriendly competition between them. "Is Doña Isabel taking care of you properly?" Nohemi would ask, "Because you look skinny." Doña Isabel pointed out that I had been sick in Nohemi's home, a clear lack of her ability to care for me apparently (although I was later sick in Isabel's care, too—not that either case of illness was related to either woman's care for me). Family feuding is common in Peñas Blancas, as it is in many small and familial communities, and as I spent more time with the families, I learned more about their complex relationships.

Virgilio and Isabel live about halfway up the mountain on the way to the cooperative. Past the baseball diamond and up a steep, muddy hill, the family's home sits surrounded by coffee trees and wild forest. I grew to hate that hill because it is always muddy and slippery, often dangerous for a clumsy person like me. Virgilio's and Isabel's six-year-old grandson, Jasser, would run quickly up or down the hill, and I would curse the rain under my heavy breath. The weather in Peñas Blancas during May usually left me in a sour mood.

The family lives in a two-story house that has several bedrooms. They do not have electricity because electric wires don't reach their home deep into the forest. Doña Isabel showed Elvin and me to our room (Elvin was still visiting me during the beginning of May). The mattress was thick and much like the one I sleep on at home; before this I had not discovered a mattress like this in Peñas Blancas. An open window in the room looks toward the white rocks. Doña Isabel showed me a pee pot and toilet paper under the bed, and then we walked downstairs so that I could see the rest of the house. A four-month-old baby rocked to sleep in a hammock by the stairs. Nothing else was in the rather large living room, except a crate of newborn baby chickens. In front of the house, an awning covers several benches. Virgilio was sitting there and chatting with Bismark, his son-in-law. Don Virgilio's daughter Judy was rocking in a chair close to them and waiting for the baby to wake from his nap (at four months old, baby boy still didn't have a name). A flower garden blossomed nearby where eight-year-old Daybin was chasing ducks with his nephew, Jasser.

Don Virgilio and Doña Isabel have five children—Reyna, Oscar (Jasser's father), Marceli, Judy (baby's mother), and Daybin. Oscar lives with his partner and two children in a small house close to the baseball diamond. He helps Virgilio and Jesus in the field and maintains several of his own fields. His small farm is one that has been certified because it sports the sign that reads "Propiedad certificada por Starbucks/FLO-CERT" (Certified property by Starbucks and FLO-CERT). Oscar's partner also owns several manzanas of *kalala* (passion fruit). Both Oscar and his partner are members of GARBO and so attend cooperative meetings with Don Virgilio and Doña Isabel.

Reyna and Marceli are unmarried and live with Don Virgilio and Doña Isabel. Like Francesca, Reyna is always in the kitchen. She pats tortillas in the morning, cooks rice and beans

during the day, and uses all her upper-body force to scrub the countertops with soap and water. Her personality is shy and quiet, so we didn't often share many words. Still, I bonded with Reyna—when she smiled, I smiled, too. It became our way of communicating through my language barrier and her shyness.

Reyna is 29-years-old and single, which is rare in Nicaragua. I never talked to her about this, but I noticed how much she longed for a child, if not a spouse. Raising a child in Nicaragua is sort of a community project, or at least a familial one, so everyone in Virgilio's family takes turns rocking the baby to sleep and entertaining him while his mother other things. I noticed that Reyna loved to play with the baby more than most. She let him walk up her belly and onto her chest and giggled as he grabbed her ears or tried sucking milk from her chin. Reyna laughed more than the baby, like it was a new trick every time.

Marceli also spends a lot of time in the kitchen. She is 23-years-old and currently attends high school with Don Marcial's son, Miguel Angél, every Saturday. Marceli says that school is important to her and finishing her high school degree gives her something to keep busy. Don Virgilio and Doña Isabel support Marceli in her studies. They allow her time to study and help her prepare for classes. Marceli resembles her mother with big, brown eyes and a nervous giggle. She is very curious—she was interested in my project with GARBO and asked questions about my experience in the university.

Judy also participates in kitchen chores, but her main priority now is taking care of her newborn son. Judy is 16-years-old. Her partner, Bismark, doubles her age—he is 32-years-old. When Judy became pregnant, Bismark moved in with the family to take care of Judy and to help provide for his new family. Bismark often works with Virgilio and Oscar in the fields while Judy cares for their son and helps out in the kitchen.

Don Virgilio's family is similar to Don Jesus' family because both come from the same background of poverty and excluded access to education. Doña Isabel explained that her family was very poor when she was growing up. She is the oldest female in her family, so she had to help raise her siblings. She did not attend school. I assume that she and Virgilio cannot read or write, similar to Nohemi and Don Jesus (although I never discussed this with them). Even with these similarities, each family's financial status and discourse about male and female roles in the household are very different from one another.

In the first home, my diet included only five things: rice, beans, potatoes, plantains, and bananas. In Doña Isabel's kitchen, I was served snack plates with mango and pineapple purchased in La Dalia, cuajada purchased from a family along the carretera, and pasta served with cream sauce and fresh tomatoes. Doña Isabel also taught me how to make nacatamales (a special dish in Nicaragua) with onions, garlic, potatoes, and peppers as the base; then rice, tomatoes, chicken, and achiote sauce on top; wrapped in a plantain leaf and boiled before serving. I noticed a clear difference in income between these families which showed even in the families' diets.

Another part of the difference is the age of each family and their children. Don Virgilio has a 27-year-old son (Oscar) and a 32-year-old son-in-law (Bismark). They help out on the farm, so the family can maintain a variety of crops and nearly seven more manzanas of land than Jesus. Jesus has a 20-year-old son (Ander) who also helps on the farm, but Ander spends most of his time at CEN. When he is available, Ander mostly attends to his own fields or helps his mother tend to her half manzana of land. Jesus farms only 6-8 manzanas of land and only grows coffee, beans, and corn.

Another difference between the families is their make-up and male-to-female ratios. Both families have five children living in the home (four children and one grandchild each). Judy's boyfriend also lives in Don Virgilio's home and contributes to the household. Importantly, while Don Virgilio's children are largely already grown into adults, Jesus' family is younger. His children range in ages from 3 to 20. Also, Jesus' only daughter moved away several years ago, so Nohemi is the only female member of the household and the only one who regularly performs household chores. Isabel has help from her three daughters.

Doña Sofia also benefits from having more females in the household. Her situation is different because the additional women are in-laws, but still every woman in the household experiences more flexibility to come and go as she wishes because household responsibilities are shared between the women. Nohemi hardly has the opportunity to leave her house because Jesus expects her to remain there and finish cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children.

A more subtle difference between Jesus' and Virgilio's families, and one that I think affects the roles of males and females in each household, is the different relationships between the male and female heads-of-household. Jesus and Nohemi were teenagers when they began living together. Nohemi explained that it was very difficult for her to leave her family's home and live with a man—her father left when both Nohemi and her sister were young girls, and she didn't live with a man again until she lived with Jesus. Now, Jesus verbally degrades Nohemi and treats her ungratefully, though she provides all of his meals and washes his clothing.

Virgilio and Isabel also cohabitated early, but they remain loving toward each other. Virgilio often thanks Isabel and his daughters when they prepare his meals, and sometimes he sweeps the patio (normally a woman's job). The family seems to get along well because the parental unit functions lovingly and Don Virgilio exhibits respect for women. In Don Jesus'

home, however, even the children suffer the consequences of a malfunctioning parental relationship and limited respect for female equality in the household.

At the end of my first week with Don Virgilio's family, I attended another meeting at the cooperative. Recently-elected Vice President Orlando was asked to step down because of his last name (Cruz). Orlando is one of Don Chico's sons. Don Virgilio suggested at the previous election that maybe someone outside the Cruz family be part of the leadership team, but no one had volunteered. Now, new President Freddy had made the executive decision that Orlando should take a break from leadership duties. Cooperative members agreed but realized that finding someone with a different last name would be difficult. Over half of the cooperative is a member of the Cruz family; and of the 80-member cooperative, only 40 or so members show up consistently to every meeting (for problems of communication about meeting dates and time, family feuds, location of cooperative in relation to their home, weather, etc.). This meeting did not exhibit a healthy proportion of Cruz to non-Cruz members. Don Marcial explained that he could not take on another large role with GARBO because he was already deeply involved in one of the cooperative's projects: finding a reliable institution to give farmers credit. Another man admitted that he just didn't want to participate in leadership. Finally, Carlos Daniel agreed to fill the position. Ironically, he is Doña Julia's nephew and therefore a direct cousin to Orlando (though not a Cruz).

On another day, when my digestive system really only wanted fresh fruit and yogurt, six-year-old Jasser burst into my room, excited about the new crop of wild raspberries that seemed to have popped up overnight. "Alycia, do you want to go out and pick raspberries with me today?" he said. "Grandpa said not to bother you while you're working, but we can pick a thousand raspberries and then Tía Reyna can make them into juice!" Of course I agreed, more excitedly

than he probably expected, so Jasser and I walked outside to pick berries along the muddy path. Everyone wanted to take care of me in Peñas Blancas, by providing me with the warmest blankets or taking my arm when it looked like I might slide down a muddy slope. Even Jasser wanted to protect me from the grazing horse who crept too close for his comfort and from the thorns on the raspberry bushes that might prick my fingers. "You can hold the bucket," he said, "I don't want you to hurt your pretty fingers." Perhaps this was budding paternalism in a largely machista culture, but I pretended that Jasser was flirting with my good looks and smiled at his chivalry.

Jasser attends school along the carretera with Jelsen, but Daybin attends a different school where Corina (Don Chico's daughter) teaches kindergarten classes. The school was privately built several years ago, although the Nicaraguan ministry of education now provides its curriculum. It offers kindergarten classes through grade three. There are two classrooms, one for the kindergarten class and one for the other three grades. Corina said that she doesn't like working with the kindergarten class because little kids (and especially large groups of them organized by one teacher) can't learn a lot in the classroom, besides coloring and playing nicely (interview with Corina).

Marceli told me the story about the construction of this school. She didn't remember the year, but she said it was built several years ago by a group of about 40 Canadian students and their leader, Amanda. Marceli didn't know whether Amanda came to the community with the idea for building a school or vice versa. For 12 days, the group stayed with families in the community to help build the school.

One day a student from the group ventured alone into the forest and got lost. He didn't speak Spanish or know how to find his way back to the construction site. The community

became worried after several hours of fruitless searching, so they told his family in Canada that the boy was lost. The family offered a monetary award for finding their son safely, and two days later he was found several towns away on a ranch in La Dalia (a one hour bus-ride away). A friendly farmer had discovered the wandering boy and offered him food and a place to sleep. Marceli didn't remember the amount of the award the rancher received for finding the boy safely, but she joked that it was a pretty expensive two-day hike in the forest.

Fear of this event happening again is probably the reason for my host mothers' deep concerns about my safety and whereabouts. One of the only rules the cooperative has for families involved in the tourism project is never to let a tourist leave the house alone. The community is desperate not to lose another tourist. Both my host mothers and fathers accompanied me on excursions outside of the home. Only after I had proven that I knew the forest paths and wouldn't get lost was I allowed to go out alone. Still, my host mothers were most concerned to know where I was going and why. This is partly because the mother of every household is usually deemed responsible for anything that might happen to the guest, whether or not those happenings are related to her caretaking abilities. For example, the family who lost the Canadian boy is no longer allowed to host community guests, and the mother has a poor reputation among other women.

Summary of "Fourth Family"

As my time in Peñas Blancas started to wind down, I was able to draw more comparisons between families and piece together whole stories about the cooperative. For example, I noted a number of similarities between Don Jesus' and Don Virgilio's families. Both families originated in Peñas Blancas, and in fact they were related. Both families started when the heads-of-households were teenagers. Now, each family has five children and one or more grandchildren.

However, there are great differences between the families. Don Virgilio's children are older, and the male-to-female ratio is more balanced with three daughters, one son, and one son-in-law who live with the family. Don Jesus' family is still young, and Nohemi is the only female in the household. Another difference I noticed was that Virgilio and Isabel share a respectful relationship while Jesus often disrespects Nohemi. The differences between families inform the different gender roles in each household. Jesus holds a strict view about women as caretakers and men as workers and providers for the home. However, in Virgilio's home, gender roles are sometimes reversed, when Virgilio sweeps the patio or cares for the baby chickens, for example.

With the help of Marceli, I was also able to piece together the story of the private primary school in the community. I learned that the school was originally a community development project with help from a group of students from Canada. The Canadian students no longer maintain a relationship with the school, so it struggles to purchase supplies and even pay the teachers. Even Corina said that the teacher salary is not a reason to work at the school; she took the job only because no one else would. Thus, education continues to be a challenge in Peñas Blancas because access to it is limited by few resources in the community and difficult transportation to other schools in the city.

Fifth Family: Arturo and Edelma

After two weeks with Don Virgilio's family, I returned to the U.S. for a scheduled trip to see my family. I spent one month after that visiting Masaya and organizing final interview questions. I had interviewed many of the families already, but in this month away from the cooperative, I designed new questions about certification and tourism for ex-President Orlando and tourism coordinator Maria.

After several weeks away I returned to the cooperative to live with the fifth and final family: Arturo and Edelma. The experience with this family was different from my earlier experiences because I only stayed for 10 days, and I spent a lot of my time traveling to other peoples' homes for interviews. Still, I lived with the family and shared most mealtimes and dinner conversations with them. Plus, I already had experience with Arturo since he spent a lot of time at Don Chico's.

Arturo and Edelma live directly across from the cooperative's eco-alberque and only minutes downhill from Don Chico and Doña Julia. Arturo is one of Don Chico's sons. He is 36-years-old and a near replica of his father. Both men are always smiling. They walk slowly, as if there is never a rush to get anywhere and nothing exciting to see anyway. When we spoke, they both repeated everything I told them, not because they were mocking my strained Spanish as I originally thought, but because that is their habit.

Edelma is 18-years-old and exactly half Arturo's age (like Judy with Bismark). Large age gaps between couples are not uncommon in Peñas Blancas, but Doña Julia still raised her brow when I recorded this information in my journal. Edelma is originally from Rancho Grande, a nearby town in northern Nicaragua, but she met Arturo for the first time in Peñas Blancas where they now maintain a life together.

Arturo and Edelma live in a large house with their two-year-old son, Maudiel. A Claro cable dish sits atop the roof and provides the family with paid access to U.S.-American sitcoms and a variety of great movies. The television sits in the living room above a two-speaker stereo and a DVD player. One of these three electronics plays throughout the whole day, from the moment Maudiel wakes up to the moment everyone returns to sleep. The living room is colorfully decorated with pictures on every wall. Most of the pictures are from Edelma's

childhood, but there is also one of Edelma and Arturo before Maudial was born. Two bedrooms are attached to the living room. The family members share one room and guests can sleep in the other. Inside the guest bedroom, there is a choice of two beds. Both have a comfortable mattress, two pillows, and several warm blankets.

One morning during my time with the family, I noticed two members of Edelma's extended family sleeping on mattresses in the living room area. I felt guilty because I was sleeping in the guest bedroom utilizing only one of the two beds while Edelma's family members were sleeping on the floor. This form of overly generous hospitality for foreign people is something I noticed during many of my experiences in Nicaragua. People willingly gave up their beds and their warmest blankets so that I would be more comfortable, maybe because they knew that I was regularly privileged with these luxuries in my native country. They willingly provided me with the best of everything as often as they were able.

A corridor leads from the living room of the house to outside. The corridor contains an electric washing machine where Arturo said I could wash my clothes. He assured me that I could also hand wash if I preferred that, but even Lucie, the French graduate student at Don Chico's, now washed her clothes here. On the other side of the corridor is the kitchen which contains a wood-burning stove and wooden sink with running water. Shelves on two walls of the kitchen hold more dishes than three people would normally use alone.

I noticed that Arturo and Edelma own many more things than the other families—but I never determined why. Arturo maintains 25 manzanas of land and works as a guide with the cooperative and CEN. Edelma stays at home with Maudial and attends school on the weekends. Sometimes she goes out on the motorcycle alone. The family doesn't seem to have any special or

extra source of income, but maybe Arturo's older age and the family's small size allow them financial freedom to own more and bigger things.

I witnessed greater respect for women and less strict gender roles in this household, like at Don Chico's, Don Marcial's, and Don Virgilio's. Arturo and Edelma share a loving relationship, and Edelma's time and energy are not stretched thin by caring for people. Edelma usually cooks for the family, but she also leaves the house whenever she wants. Arturo sometimes stays at home to care for Maudial when Edelma is away. The family's small size and equal number of males and females seems to contribute to their different ideas about gender roles. Another part of the family's relationship to gender might relative to their parents' and families' ideas about gender. At least Arturo's father, Don Chico, models respect for women and less strict gender roles in the home. Maybe he passed these ideas along to his children.

It was cloudy and raining when I stayed with this family in July, which would have been okay if I hadn't wanted or needed to leave the house. Rain makes the forest paths more treacherous than usual, even dangerous for an ungraceful woman with little experience climbing up and down muddy slopes. Rain didn't seem to stop other people from leaving the house, though, so I ventured out too, grudgingly and only when I needed to be somewhere.

On one occasion, I visited Don Virgilio and Doña Isabel to interview members of their family. I had only been gone for one month, but the cooperative and the families had changed, if only minutely. The baby chickens were now almost fully grown, and the baby boy had a name (which I never remembered to record). When I visited, I spoke to Doña Isabel about her role as a woman in the cooperative. Many members had already told me that the new presidency also meant new roles for active members. Doña Isabel explained that before, when Orlando was President, she and other female cooperative members were often invited to prepare meals at the

eco-albergue for large groups of tourists or visiting teachers who hosted training sessions for cooperative members. Now, Don Freddy was inviting more women to participate in the cooperative, so Doña Isabel was invited less often to cater special events. Other women were taking turns preparing meals for visitors.

I suggested to Doña Isabel that more female participation with GARBO might be beneficial—to provide work for more women, to address strict gender roles about women as only caretakers, and even to provide fun activities and companionship for women outside the home. Doña Isabel looked at me funny but didn't say anything. Later I thought about this again. If the cooperative wanted to expand and invite more community members to participate, it would also have to find more opportunities for participation.

Doña Isabel explained that she did not like Don Freddy's work as President so far, because he did not prioritize the cooperative's rural tourism project. For Doña Isabel's family, and for other families involved in the project, rural tourism is what they hope will provide a more stable source of income in coming years. Without it, they will have to find something else to supplement their small farming earnings.

When I visited Don Jesus' family again, Nohemi and Ander expressed similar opinions about the new President. Ander lamented that Don Freddy didn't seem to care about the tourism project or the families involved in it. Coffee and certification are his main priorities, and everything else has been set aside. During Orlando's presidency, coffee, certification, and tourism were all priorities. I noticed then that Orlando struggled to place equal focus on all of these, but he chose to support each initiative of cooperative members because they were all important to different people. Nohemi told me that most cooperative members preferred Orlando

to Don Freddy for President. The general consensus in July was that cooperative members missed the old President and wished he would return[20].

On one of my last days at the cooperative, I interviewed Maria about her role as coordinator for the rural tourism project. Before the interview, I learned that Maria had stepped down from her role with the cooperative in May because members and leadership had complained that she wasn't doing enough for the project. Since the project started in 2009, Maria had worked as an unpaid volunteer to coordinate the finances of the project, publicize the cooperative, match tourists with families, and set up training sessions for participants about how to host foreign people. Now Maria is 21-years-old and a university student. She can no longer maintain the coordinator position which she calls a full-time job without pay.

Regardless, Maria knows a lot about tourism at GARBO because she worked with the project for four years. She explained several challenges for tourism in Peñas Blancas. First, she said that GARBO suffers from a huge lack in national and international publicity which prevents people from even knowing that tourism is an option in Peñas Blancas. Therefore, income from the project is far from regular because tourists only visit occasionally and mostly when they get lost in the northern part of Nicaragua. Second, Maria explained that the lack of publicity is part of a bigger problem of limited access to communication networks. GARBO has a Facebook page that lists a telephone number and email address, but no one at the cooperative has access to internet or phone signal in Peñas Blancas. Instead, when Maria was working with GARBO, she traveled to the city once per week to check the cooperative's email and reply to messages. Now that she no longer works with the cooperative, Maria isn't sure who, if anyone, is performing this task. Third, Maria said that no one at the cooperative speaks a language other than Spanish, so

[20] Opinions about Don Freddy and his presidency may have changed since the date of my field work (summer 2013). In July, Don Freddy's presidency was still new, only two months old.

members struggle to host tourists who do not speak Spanish. Often non-Spanish speaking tourists are sent to CEN because they have English-speaking guides.

Maria explained that these challenges might have resulted from the project's weak foundation. Peñas Blancas didn't see a lot of tourists before the project began, so members couldn't expect visitors to show up overnight, especially without publicity or access to communication to outside people. However, even with a weak foundation, the project has been successful. "Maybe the tourism project didn't have a strong foundation," she said, "but it had the strongest foundation and the best results of any of the projects we've ever tried. And people care about it."

Maria no longer works with GARBO or its tourism project. Instead, she has started a tourist project of her own. Maria lives with her family along the carretera. Her home has access to tourists traveling the road and looking for a place to eat or stay the night. Maria has opened a comedor like the one in Doña Julia's home. A sign out front invites people to stop in for a hearty meal of rice, bean soup, potatoes, and cuajada with coffee included. Maria plans to build several cabins that will accommodate individual tourists and groups. She hopes that this new project will gain publicity as more people visit the area and share about their experience.

When I asked how this new project related to the tourism project at GARBO, Maria said she wasn't sure yet. She explained that she is building this tourist business for herself and for her family; and if cooperative families also want to invest in rural tourism, they will have to do so on their own initiative. Without a coordinator, GARBO's tourism project is largely inactive.

Summary of "Fifth Family"

In my last two weeks at the cooperative, I stayed with a younger and smaller family who appeared to be more affluent than other families involved in the project. They allowed me the

freedom to go out every day on my own to perform interviews with other members of the cooperative, which meant that I spent less time bonding with them than with other families.

In interviews and other conversations with cooperative members during my final days with GARBO, I learned that GARBO's rural tourism project is facing new challenges. The new President does not plan to focus on rural tourism in the upcoming two years of his presidency, and the volunteer coordinator, Maria, no longer works with the cooperative. The future of the project seems unsure, and members are upset about that.

Revisiting my Thesis

When I was staying in Don Chico's home, I talked about Fair Trade with a U.S.-American woman who visited GARBO with a group of activist students. She was the group's leader and one who traveled with tourist groups in Nicaragua to explore social justice activism and participate in certain development projects. I explained that I was becoming frustrated with my thesis project because the practices of Fair Trade in Peñas Blancas did not seem to be the same as the principles. GARBO production was not organic, buyers did not seem to have direct contact with the cooperative, and community development appeared entirely unrelated to certification. Fair Trade isn't what I thought it was, I complained. The woman smiled and said, "The reality of Fair Trade is not that it is not functioning; the reality is that Fair Trade is not functioning in the way that we think."

In contrast to definitions about Fair Trade, I discovered that Fair Trade in Peñas Blancas: is not direct but flows from first-, second-, and third-tier cooperatives; is not completely organic; and finally, does not provide the cooperative assistance with community development projects or with seeking institutions for credit. Starbucks certification is very similar. By interviewing

farmers, I discovered that Fair Trade and Starbucks certifiers do not participate in GARBO's tourism project. Their only role in the cooperative is to provide annual certification for GARBO's coffee crop, and at a high cost. However, the cooperative chooses to focus on both certified coffee and rural tourism because they hope that both will boost family incomes in Peñas Blancas.

It's true that Fair Trade certification exists for farmers at GARBO cooperative, and it might even be true that Fair Trade certification is more financially beneficial than conventional certification or no certification at all. Still, Fair Trade is a market-based approach to social justice and development. It relies on the market to change everything for farmers, from providing them an adequate wage to developing their communities.

However, expecting the market to change everything for the community is unrealistic. People are the ones who make changes, especially local people who are fully invested in the development of their communities[21]. For this reason, rural tourism has become the main focus for GARBO cooperative. Rural tourism is a development project in Peñas Blancas, for people and by people, regardless of Fair Trade's existence in the area.

Members of the GARBO are especially invested in rural tourism because they hope it will develop their community by bringing a reliable source of income and a steady flow of visitors to the area. It's true that coffee is important to Peñas Blancas, so important that community members want to tell visiting people about it. But what is most valuable to the community is not the coffee bean so much as the coffee growers—and further, their relationships to visitors who care about the community.

[21] For more about this, see Horton.

Conclusion

I visited each of the families one last time during my final week in the mountains. Nohemi sent me home with a box of one dozen eggs, Doña Julia invited me to return for a visit next time I was on break from school, Doña Sofia gave me a live chicken and said I could keep it as a pet or make it into soup, Doña Isabel made a special meal with fried duck (and I learned that I don't like fried duck), and Edelma prepared a special breakfast with fresh cow's milk and sweet rolls on the morning that I left the cooperative. The final goodbyes were bittersweet.

In some ways I was excited to leave GARBO. I missed having easier access to internet and 24-hour phone signal. Even so, I felt overwhelmingly sad to be leaving Peñas Blancas because it had been my home for several months. I was leaving my new families indefinitely—and who knew when I would return to stay with Doña Julia or to show Doña Sofia my pet chicken? I would miss my new families. I would miss the bad coffee and being woken in the morning by little hands. I would miss dinner conversations in Spanish that I didn't completely understand. I would miss walking through mud and picking fresh raspberries in the rain. And I would miss the food—I would really miss the food, especially cuajada and malanga, prepared so lovingly by my host families. Three months in Peñas Blancas was long enough for me to grow accustomed to certain parts of life there, to fall in love with the people and the landscape, and to perfect certain household tasks like pounding tortillas and hand-washing jean pants. I didn't like everything, nor did I know everything about life in Peñas Blancas, but I was now part of that life—or maybe that life was now part of me.

These reflections on my last day in Peñas Blancas challenged me to think about my new identity in the community—was I still a rural tourist or had I graduated to something more like a community member? No one in Peñas Blancas viewed me as a local person, but not everyone

saw me as a foreign person either[22]. People recognized me. They knew my name, and many of them knew other things about me, my family, and my research project. I was no longer a tourist in Nicaragua, nor was I an equal part of the community—I was something else altogether, but what?

After I left Peñas Blancas, I traveled south to spend a few weeks in the city. I traveled back and forth to Managua from Masaya to use internet and to say goodbye to other people I had met in Nicaragua. One day I was sitting alone and sipping strong and unsweetened coffee at a ritzy coffee shop in Managua, La Casa del Café (The House of Coffee). The coffee shop is well-known and local to Nicaragua, but there are only a few of them that exist and only in the city. This one is situated on the second floor of Metrocentro shopping center overlooking a first floor platform that has occasional car shows and modeling contests. Metrocentro reminds me of shopping centers in Ohio, except that cigarette smoking is allowed indoors and the walking area is not air-conditioned. It smells like bad perfume and McDonald's French fries. Women wear high heels and painted nails. Professional-looking men in suits talk on their cell phones and wave folders fat with papers. Like other commercial shopping centers in Nicaragua, Metrocentro is unofficially for mostly rich Nicaraguan people and foreign tourists—or for teenage dates after school and window shopping.

On this day, I was sitting at a table outside the coffee shop where I ordered an expensive salad with coffee. I used free internet to communicate with my family in the United States as I listened to two U.S.-American tourists share breakfast conversation about their experiences in Nicaragua. The tourists were new acquaintances, and so shared stories about their adventurous endeavors backpacking through Central America. The woman explained that she was coming back from a yoga retreat in La Isla de Ometepe. It's beautiful there, she said, and one of the more

[22] See Swantz for more about a researcher's identity as neither native (local) nor outsider (tourist).

rural and adventurous parts of Nicaragua. The landscape is sort of *exotic*, so climbing hills required skill and effort, she exclaimed. Both tourists marveled at their discovery of a Nicaraguan paradise they supposed was largely undisturbed by negative outside influences.

I have also been to La Isla de Ometepe, so I agree that it is beautiful. Still, the island is full of tourists—in fact, it's a tourist destination, and many tourist companies in Granada and Managua advertise it that way. People local to the island and Nicaraguans from the city often work as bilingual tourist guides there. Tourism on La Isla de Ometepe is very different from that in Peñas Blancas, partly because there is greater access to and advertisement for the island. The island also maintains ATM banks, hotels and hostels, mountain- and motor-bike rentals, bars, and various sit-down restaurants for foreign and Nicaraguan tourists alike. Tourists can spend a day hiking the volcano or biking around the island and then return to the amenities of a hotel in the evening.

I suspect that these tourists from the U.S. experienced the island very differently than I experienced Peñas Blancas. For example, in Peñas Blancas I spent every day and evening talking with my hosts and living as they might. I didn't have the opportunity to go out for pizza in the evening or bathe under a faucet. In another way, I suspect that the tourists and I experienced tourism on La Isla de Ometepe differently—and we would have had different experiences in Peñas Blancas, had they traveled there—primarily because we were reflecting about our experiences differently. I wouldn't describe either location as exotic or undisturbed by outside influences, because I know otherwise.

In many ways, I was similar to these U.S.-American tourists. Both the tourists and I were able to sit in the coffee shop and pay prices comparable to those in the United States for Starbucks-quality coffee. I was eating a salad with crisp, dried apples and feta cheese for the first

time during my whole experience in Nicaragua—apples don't even grow in Nicaragua and feta cheese is quite uncommon. The tourists were talking about their adventures in rural and different parts of Nicaragua, while checking their iPhones and recording their discussion in moleskin travel journals. We were all reflecting about our adventures in Nicaragua, but had I really experienced rural Nicaragua in the same way as these tourists? Could we all be classified in the same way? Were we all rural tourists?

The short answer is yes: all of us experienced rural Nicaragua as tourists and so could be termed "rural tourists" collectively. However, several things differentiate my experience as a rural tourist from those of other tourists: my length of stay in Peñas Blancas, my relationship to community members, and my effort to critically reflect about the experience for the purpose of this thesis. First, I stayed in Peñas Blancas for three months. I bathed with a community bucket, swept dirt floors, and patted tortillas every morning. A three-month stay didn't make me a local, but it didn't leave me a tourist either. Everyday tasks were now habitual for me. I was learning how to live like a local person, even if I wasn't one.

Second, because I had lived in Peñas Blancas for three months, I knew the local gossip and many familial habits. I knew that so-and-so's husband had left several years earlier to live with his new family in Costa Rica. I knew whose fields were being harvested soon and whose coffee crop wouldn't survive la roya. I even knew that Nohemi's sons, Henr and Josué, loved cucumbers and raw yucca but spit out anything that tasted like tomatoes. I knew these things because I was considered and considered myself to be part of these families—maybe not equal in status as a blood-child, but maybe as an adopted one. I shared intimate relationships with nearly all of my new friends in Peñas Blancas.

And third, because it was part of my research project, I critically reflected about my experience as a tourist every day. I learned in the beginning that it was okay to accept my identity as a foreign person because really I am different—my body cannot handle the local diet and my Spanish accent is obvious. What is important is how my identity as a foreign person affected my experience in the mountains—and how it affected my hosts and the community.

My extended stay in the community and my intimate relationships with family members differentiated me from other rural tourists and encouraged me to find a separate word of identification—I was not a tourist but *a guest* in Peñas Blancas. Families had invited me into their homes. They cared for me as though I was of equal part in their community. They welcomed me into their lives—and I welcomed them into mine. Even now, nearly one year later, I keep in touch with the families via telephone (on occasion, because there is still limited phone signal in the mountains). I became a guest in Peñas Blancas because I stayed in the community for several months and was submersed in family and community life there. In this sense I claim that "guest in the community" is a category of visitor who has relationships deeper than regular tourists.

Critical reflection of my own experience also allowed me to recognize several negative results of tourism in Peñas Blancas. One negative result is that GARBO's rural tourism project has created greater inequality between Don Chico's and other households. Because his house is located closest and there is easier access to it, Don Chico and his family receive most of the tourists who visit Peñas Blancas. Other families only maintain excess numbers of visitors or large groups (and only if they're organized beforehand). Therefore, rural tourism in Peñas Blancas does not benefit everyone equally because of financial restraints and location. Instead, tourism has become more of an individual initiative than a community project—even Maria who

previously coordinated the project now plans to focus only on a separate and individual project that will benefit only her and her family.

A second negative result is that rural tourism introduces cultural exchange that can formulate or reinforce certain stereotypes or stigmas—of both tourists and local people. For example, Don Marcial learned that U.S.-American tourists prefer more privacy than (average) Nicaraguans. This changed his behavior and the way he interacted with me. In fact, he built a private guesthouse for tourists to experience greater privacy away from his home. Don Marcial also expressed his knowledge that tourists generally prefer or require nicer amenities than his own family. For example, I was the only one who used the nice letrina while his family of 12 shared the old one behind the house. Therefore, tourism might create a stratified self-concept where locals view themselves as requiring less or being less than Western tourists.

In another sense, tourists also develop or "confirm" stereotypical viewpoints about people who live in rural communities. For example, a tourist in Peñas Blancas who only stays with Don Jesus' family might assume that all families in Peñas Blancas lack electricity and express unequal gender stereotypes—but really, most households in the community do have electric lights and even televisions, and I met many men and women in Peñas Blancas who openly challenge the "machista" mindset stereotypical to rural areas. Therefore, one experience in Nicaragua threatens to create or confirm certain stereotypes for both the host and the tourist.

A third negative result of rural tourism is that it can be dangerous for both the tourist and the host community. Remember the story about the tourist who got lost for several days in the forest—if his story had ended differently and he had not been found, the GARBO community might have faced legal problems, and their reputation as a tourist spot would have been damaged, even though the incident was not their fault. But how do we decide who is responsible

for tourists when they visit a rural community? Community members want to take responsibility, but if they care for tourists in the same way that they care for their own family members, tourists might feel suffocated and frustrated by the intensity of care; and if community members do not care for tourists in this way, a tourist might become lost or injured, ultimately ending in a negative experience and a damaged reputation for community members, both inside and outside the community.

Does this mean that the ideal of tourism must be compromised by its success? Rural tourism as community development cannot be praised if it works to create greater inequality between households. And although many members of the cooperative speak positively about their experiences with cultural exchange, we cannot forget that the mere presence of tourists in Peñas Blancas changes the behaviors and practices of community members. For example, Don Marcial changed his behavior to give tourists more privacy, and Francesca designs meals for tourists that are full of fresh fruits and vegetables, even though her family's diet remains largely the same. Tourists assume they are experiencing life in Peñas Blancas as it always has been, as something that remains uninfluenced by their presence in the community, but really that's impossible[23].

I suggest that tourism does not have to be compromised by these effects. Tourism can be a positive exchange for both the host community and the visiting, as evidenced by my experience in Peñas Blancas. In my experience, tourism has the potential to change visitors beneficially. For example, an excerpt from my field notes on May 9, 2013, celebrates the many things I learned about rural life and even myself during my time in Peñas Blancas:

> "I have learned to wash laundry by hand; I have learned to pat tortillas; I have learned about how to check for honey in the bee boxes; I have practiced milking a cow; I

[23] See MacCannell.

have learned the paths of the forest and the names of cooperative members; I have learned to make pineapple empanadas; I have learned my way around the bus systems to La Dalia and to Matagalpa; I have learned to live without electricity; I have learned to make rice and beans on a wood-burning stove; I have learned to make all forms of fried plantains; I have learned to appreciate cats (because no one here does); I have learned to live from a suitcase and feel at home in many different places; I have learned to watch out for poisonous red-necked snakes on the walking path; I have learned to walk up and down slippery mountainsides and along the rocky carretera in flip flops; I have learned to deal with the sporadic stock of the "best" store along the carretera (I say "best" because this store is the biggest but hardly ever has anything we go there for—and the woman who works there is completely indifferent and unapologetic about that); I have learned the best (and only) spots in Peñas Blancas with cell phone service; I have learned about education in rural areas and the challenges teachers and students face; I have learned the kindness of people in Nicaragua and how to follow their slower rhythm of life; I have learned to make bread in a wood-fire oven; I have been introduced to new ideas and challenges to gender roles in rural areas; I have learned to bucket bathe with ice-cold water (and therefore how to bathe very quickly); and I have learned to deal with myself when I am sick. Really, I have grown up; I have gained confidence in my own abilities; and I have been humbled by the sweet generosity of good people."

In three months in Peñas Blancas and six months total in Nicaragua, I learned about the country and about Nicaraguan people. I became less comfortable about things I hadn't noticed before—for example, the convenience (or not) of processed foods at the grocery, the environmental effect of my Tressemé hair products, and the high cost of coffee at the

supermarket. I became uncomfortable with these things because I had to think about them in Nicaragua. It was no longer convenient to buy processed foods in the mountains because of location and price. My chemically-laden shampoo seemed dangerous as it mixed with clean river water. And a $3 cup of coffee in Managua appeared outrageous in comparison to Nohemi's family who could not afford even $3 of healthy vegetables from the market.

The future of rural tourism in Peñas Blancas remains uncertain because it depends on how tourism expands in the community within the next few years—whether or not and how the number of tourists increases, whether or not tourism becomes a reliable source of income for the community, and how community members adjust to these changes in tourism. My account demonstrates only the beginning of GARBO's tourism project. It is also a special experience and probably not the one that most tourists will have, since most tourists only stay with one family for two or three days.

Still, tourism in Peñas Blancas has the potential to be a successful project, and family members are hopeful that it will become a positive exchange between Nicaraguan families and foreigners—but my research reveals several points of caution. First, tourism as a business can financially assist in the development of GARBO and the surrounding community, *but we have to be careful (or at least aware) that tourism changes life in the community for local people, whether beneficially or not.* Second, rural tourism can provide cultural exchange that is beneficial for both tourists and local people, *but we have to be careful that this exchange does not provide only a surface-view of local and foreign people that actually works to stimulate unfair stereotypes of both groups.* And finally, we have to be cautious moving forward with tourism in the community, because we don't know yet what course it will take. Will the project expand, like in La Isla de Ometepe, where tourist venues are confused for the unchanged local

atmosphere? Will foreign people take over the development of tourism, similar to the experience in Granada, where local people are considered a venue for foreign people more than equal partners in tourism?

I hope that tourism in Peñas Blancas is successful and beneficial for families in the community—and my experience demonstrates that it can be both. Still, only time and experience (and perhaps lessons learned from other successful and failed attempts by similar communities) will show us whether or not that can happen.

Images

Image 1: Fair Trade Label

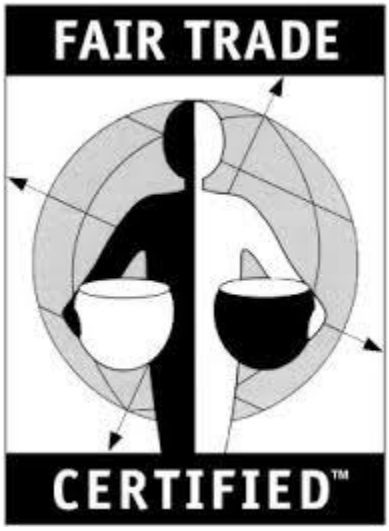

Image 2: Polvoròn

Image 3: Metal hand grinder used to make tortillas or coffee

Image 4: Pounding tortillas in the morning

Image 5: Jesus pounding tortillas

Image 6: Wilmer pounding tortillas

Image 7: Primary School along the carretera

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Appendix 1

General Research Questions for Family Members

1. ¿Cuál es su trabajo o su parte en la cooperativa/Como participa usted en GARBO? *What is your work or your part in the cooperative/How do you participate in GARBO?*

Personal Life - Before

2. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo hizo antes de trabajar con GARBO? *What type of work did you do before you worked with GARBO?*
3. ¿Cómo era la vida antes de trabajar con GARBO? *How was your life before you worked with GARBO?*
4. ¿Cómo fue su niñez? ¿Dónde creció usted? *How was your childhood? Where did you grow up?*
5. ¿Cuándo empezó a trabajar con GARBO? ¿Y por qué? *When did you start working with GARBO? And why?*
6. ¿Han cambiado algunas cosas para usted y la familia? ¿De qué manera? *Have things changed for you and your family? How?*

Personal Life - Now

7. ¿Qué hace usted diariamente? ¿Cómo es un día normal? *What do you do on a daily basis? What is a normal day?*
8. ¿Hace trabajo afuera de la cooperativa? ¿Por qué? *Do you work outside the cooperative? Why?*

Tourism (all members of GARBO/the tourism project)

9. ¿Por qué quiere usted participar en el turismo de la finca? *Why do you want to participate in rural tourism?*
10. ¿Cuándo empezó el proyecto en la casa? *When did the project start in your home?*
11. ¿Cómo funciona el proyecto en esta casa? *How does the project work in your home?*
12. ¿Qué cosas del proyecto le gustan/no le gustan? *What parts of the project do you like/don't you like?*
13. ¿Necesita cambiar algunas cosas en la casa para tener huéspedes o no? *Do you need to change things in your home to have guests or not?*
14. ¿Y cómo ha sido las experiencias aquí con turistas? *And how have the experiences been here with tourists?*

Coffee (only the farmers)

15. ¿Qué sabe usted sobre la certificación del café? *What do you know about the certification of coffee?*
16. ¿Conoce usted los certificadores? *Do you know the certifiers?*
17. ¿Cómo funciona el proceso de certificación? *How does the process of certification work?*
18. ¿Cuáles son los requerimientos para la certificación de FLO-CERT? ¿Y de Starbucks? *What are the requirements to have FLO-CERT certification? And Starbucks certification?*

19. ¿Qué piensa usted sobre la certificación de café? ¿Le gusta? *What do you think about the certification of coffee? Do you like it?*
20. ¿Cómo mantiene la certificación? ¿Necesita hacer algo diferente que antes? *How do you maintain certification? Do you need to do anything different than before?*
21. ¿La producción de café aquí es orgánica o no? ¿Por qué? *Is the production of coffee here organic or not? Why?*
22. ¿Cuáles son los beneficios de tener certificación? *What are the benefits to having certification?*
23. ¿Cuáles son las metas/los problemas? *What are the challenges/the problems?*
24. ¿Cómo se usa usted el premio de la certificación? ¿Recibe un premio o no? *How do you use the (Fair Trade) premium for certification? Do you receive a premium or not?*

La Roya (only the farmers)

25. ¿Cómo afectó su cosecha de café este año (2012 a 2013)? *How did la roya affect your coffee harvest this year (2012-2013)?*
26. ¿Cuántas plantas se afectaron en el campo de usted? ¿Todavía existe? *How many plants were affected in your fields? Does it still exist?*
27. ¿Va a impedir la próxima cosecha también? ¿De qué manera? *Will la roya affect next year's harvest also? How?*
28. ¿Qué está haciendo para combatirla? *What are you doing to combat la roya?*
29. ¿Recibe ayuda por eso? ¿De dónde (de la cooperativa/los certificadores..)? *Do you receive help for this? From where (from the cooperative/the certifiers)?*

30. Y finalmente, ¿Cómo está la cooperativa ahora? ¿Cómo está la organización/la comunicación entre la cooperativa y ustedes? *And finally, how is the cooperative doing currently? How is the organization/communication between the cooperative and the members?*

Appendix 2

Specific Questions for Orlando Cruz

The Cooperative - History

1. ¿Cuándo empezó la cooperativa? ¿Con cuántos miembros (cuantas mujeres)? *When did the cooperative start? With how many members (how many women)?*
2. ¿Cómo empezó (con miembros de la comunidad/con ayuda de fuentes externos)? ¿Y por qué? *How did it start (with members from the community/with help from outside sources)? And why?*
3. ¿Cuándo empezó la cooperativa, tenía certificación de FLO-CERT o Starbucks?/¿Cuándo obtuvo esta certificación? ¿Y por qué? *When the cooperative started, did it have FLO-CERT or Starbucks certification?/When did it obtain this certification?*

FLO-CERT and Starbucks Certification

4. ¿Cómo funciona la certificación de FLO-CERT? De Starbucks? *How does FLO-CERT certification work? Starbucks certification?*
5. ¿Hay una diferencia entre las dos certificaciones? *Is there a difference between certifications?*
6. ¿Cuáles son los requerimientos de FLO-CERT? De Starbucks? *What are the requirements of FLO-CERT? Of Starbucks?*
7. ¿Requieren la producción orgánica o no? ¿Requieren la producción de la sombra o no? *Do they require organic production or not? Do they require production in the shade or not?*
8. ¿Qué pasa cada año con los certificadores? ¿Cómo mantienen la certificación? ¿Cómo certifican el café? *What happens each year with the certifiers? How do they maintain certification? How do they certify coffee?*
9. ¿Qué hacen ustedes para mantener la certificación? *What do GARBO members do to maintain certification?*
10. ¿Cuáles son los beneficios de tener la certificación de FLO-CERT y Starbucks? *What are the benefits to having FLO-CERT and Starbucks certification?*
11. ¿Cuáles son las metas/los problemas? *What are the challenges/the problems?*

La Roya

12. ¿Cómo afectó la cosecha de café este año (2012 a 2013)? ¿Cuántas plantas se afectaron? *How did la roya affect the coffee harvest this year (2012-2013)? How many plants were affected?*
13. ¿Todavía existe en los campos? *Does it still exist in the fields?*
14. ¿Va a impedir la próxima cosecha también? ¿De qué manera? *Will it affect the next harvest also? How?*
15. ¿Qué está haciendo la cooperativa para combatir la roya en la próxima cosecha? *What is the cooperative doing to combat the roya for the next harvest?*
16. ¿Recibe ayuda de los certificadores? ¿Por qué (no)? *Do you receive help from the certifiers? Why (why not)?*

The Cooperative - Now

17. ¿Cuál es su parte en la cooperativa? ¿Cuál es el trabajo del Presidente? *What is your part in the cooperative? What is the work of the President?*
18. ¿Cómo está la cooperativa ahora? *How is the cooperative doing now?*
19. ¿Cómo está la organización/comunicación de la cooperativa? *How is the organization/communication of the cooperative?*
20. ¿Cómo es la relación entre la cooperativa y CEN? *How is the relationship between the cooperative and CEN?*

Appendix 3

Specific Questions for Maria

1. ¿Cuál es su trabajo en la cooperativa?/¿Cómo participa usted con GARBO? *What is your work in the cooperative?/How do you participate with GARBO?*

History of the GARBO Tourism Project

2. ¿Cuándo empezó el proyecto del turismo en la finca? *When did the rural tourism project start?*
3. ¿Cómo empezó? ¿Con quién? *How did it start? With who?*
4. ¿Cuándo construyó el eco-albergue? *When was the eco-albergue built?*
5. ¿Cómo seleccionó las familias para el proyecto? *How were the families selected for the project?*
6. ¿Había una capacitación para las familias? *Was there training for the families?*

The Tourism Project - Now

7. ¿Cómo funciona el turismo en GARBO? ¿Cómo se encuentra GARBO? ¿Cuándo hay turistas, como se decide en donde quedar? ¿Cuánto cuesta (para el eco-albergue/con las familias)? ¿De ese dinero, cuanto recibe la familia? *How does rural tourism work in GARBO? How do you find GARBO? When there are tourists, how do you decide where they stay? How much does it cost (for the eco-albergue/with the families)? Of this money, how much does the family receive?*
8. ¿Hay reglas para tener huéspedes extranjeros en la casa? *Are there rules to have foreign guests in family homes?*
9. ¿Cuáles son las metas/los problemas con el proyecto? *What are the challenges/the problems with the project?*
10. ¿Hay algunos problemas con la organización del proyecto? ¿Cómo son? *Are there problems with the organization of the project? What are they?*
11. ¿Hay actividades para los turistas? ¿Cómo son? *Are there activities for the tourists? What are they?*
12. ¿Cuál es la relación entre la cooperativa, el proyecto para turismo en la finca y CEN? *What is the relationship between the cooperative, the rural tourism project, and CEN?*
13. ¿Hay una relación entre el turismo o los certificadores? *Is there a relationship between tourism and the certifiers of Fair Trade?*

Additional projects at GARBO

14. Háblame un poquito sobre el proyecto de tener una panadería en la comunidad. ¿Cómo empezó? Y por qué? *Talk to me a little about the project to have a bakery in the community. How did it start? And why?*
15. ¿Se empezó con cuantas mujeres? *How many women did it start with?*
16. ¿Por qué no funcionó? *Why didn't it work?*

Appendix 4

Specific Questions for Mark Lester

1. What is your relationship and involvement with GARBO cooperative?
2. What is your part in the organization Viento de Paz (Winds of Peace)?
3. Can you explain a little bit about what the organization does in Nicaragua?
4. You work with other Fair Trade and non-Fair Trade coffee cooperatives in Nicaragua. Are there general or noticeable differences between Fair Trade and non-Fair Trade cooperatives? Can you explain these in some detail?
5. Are there general or noticeable differences between Fair Trade cooperatives? (For instance, with those that have direct access to selling on the Fair Trade market and those that do not.)
6. Is it fair to say that Viento de Paz has seemingly discovered that Fair Trade does not function in the way that we think it does, or in the way that we advertise? Can you talk about why this might be?
7. With your work at various coffee cooperatives, you have witnessed varying degrees of la roya in Nicaragua. Can you say that GARBO has been more or less affected?
8. In your time working with GARBO, have you seen a difference in the lives of cooperative members before and after receiving Fair Trade certification/before and after the start of the tourism project? Have you seen a difference in the production of coffee at the cooperative before and after receiving Fair Trade certification/before and after the start of the tourism project?
9. What has been your experience working with the cooperative?
10. What has been your experience working with the cooperative's tourism project?